

NEITHER WHOLLY PUBLIC, NOR WHOLLY PRIVATE: INTERSTITIAL SPACES IN
WORKS BY NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS

A Dissertation

by

MIRANDA A. GREEN-BARTEET

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2009

Major Subject: English

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ABSTRACT

Neither Wholly Public, Nor Wholly Private: Interstitial Spaces in Works

by Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers. (August 2009)

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This project examines the representation of architectural and metaphoric spaces in the works of four nineteenth-century American women writers: Harriet Wilson, Harriet Jacobs, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Edith Wharton. I focus on what I call interstitial spaces: spaces that are neither wholly public nor private but that exist somewhere in between the public and private realms. Interstitial spaces are locations that women writers claim to resist the predominantly private restrictions of the family or the predominantly public conventions of society. Interstitiality becomes a border space that enables women writers—both for themselves and for their fictional characters—to redefine, rearrange, and challenge the expectations of public and private spaces in the nineteenth century.

This dissertation investigates how nineteenth-century American women writers create interstitial spaces. Further, it demonstrates how they use such spaces to express their views, manipulate the divisions between the public and private realms, and defy societal and familial conventions.

Since the mid-1970s, critics have been analyzing public and private under the assumption that the boundaries between the spheres were more porous than originally thought. This project adds to the critical dialogue concerning the separation of public and private realms

as the conceptual framework of criticism shifts from an increased awareness of gender, race, and class. My project responds to the growing trend of analyzing literary works through architectural and spatial theories. While applying such theories, I focus on how race and class affect a writer's ability to create interstitial spaces. I further respond to this trend by considering authors who have not yet been included in this way, namely Wilson and Phelps. By analyzing the physical and rhetorical ways these authors manipulate space, I offer an account of gender, race, and class along with architectural and spatial concepts that juxtaposes authors who have not yet been considered together. My dissertation offers a new critical vocabulary to consider writers' representations of spaces by employing the word interstitial, which no other critic uses. I specifically use interstitial to describe spaces that exist between the public and private realms and describe the transformation in space that occurs through spatial and rhetorical manipulation.

To my children, Sawyer and Owen,
Who have taught me that interstitial spaces exist everywhere
and that separating the public from the private is impossible.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the fall of 2004, I began an independent study with Dr. Kimberly N. Brown on nineteenth-century African American women writers. During the course of this project, I read several texts, including Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig*, which sparked my interest in the way women writers represented spaces, particularly ones that couldn't be defined as either wholly public or wholly private. As I prepared for my preliminary exams, I began noticing how often such spaces recurred throughout works written by nineteenth-century American women. Ultimately, this project developed from a single sentence in an early draft of my dissertation proposal: "Women often claim control over what I will call interstitial spaces—physical locations that are neither wholly private nor wholly public." The interplay between public and private that I identified caught the attention of my entire committee, and I was encouraged to revise my proposal focusing on the idea of interstitial spaces. In the past three years, I have spent countless hours considering the role of interstitial spaces in literature written by American women. I'm happy to say I love this project more now than when I began it, and I hope to continue my work in this area for a long time to come. I have many people to thank for encouraging me to focus on the interplay between space, be it physical or metaphorical, and literature.

Several groups awarded me funds to complete archival research for this project. First, I want to thank Dr. Claudia Nelson, Director of the Women's Studies Program at Texas A&M, and the Women's Studies Graduate Committee for awarding me the 2006-2007 Women's Studies Dissertation Year Fellowship. This fellowship enabled me to travel to Edith Wharton's home The Mount, in Lenox, MA, where I studied architectural plans of Wharton's. I am also thankful to the English Department's Graduate Studies Office at Texas A&M University for awarding me two travel grants, which helped fund my trip to The Mount and a subsequent trip to the

Houghton Library at Harvard University and the Beineke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, where I was able to complete archival research on Harriet Jacobs, Edith Wharton, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. I am especially grateful to the Melbern C. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research and Dr. Jim Rosenheim, the Center's director. Through the auspices of the Center and Dr. Rosenheim, I received the Graduate Student Travel to Archives Grant, which also helped fund my research trips to the Houghton and the Beineke.

In May 2007, I spent two days at The Mount, exploring the grounds that Wharton helped design and examining architectural plans for the house. I want to thank Susan Wissler, Vice President of The Mount, and Molly McFall, The Mount's librarian, for granting me access to The Mount's library and showing me the house's architectural plans. I'd also like to thank the gracious librarians at the Houghton Library and those at the Beineke Rare Book Manuscript Library, particularly the lovely librarian named Stella who got special permission for me to photocopy portions of Edith Wharton's personal scrapbooks.

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a degree; we each had a child (or, in some cases, children) while working on our dissertations. These wonderful children are Hayden Lawrence, Josi and Delilah Gilbert-Hickey, Alison Terry, Dylan Thomas, Fallon Edwards, and Harley Quinn Montz Rintala. I would also like to thank a number of friends who have provided me with lots of encouragement and love along the way: Lan, David, and Rusty Ly-McMurray; Dawn Goode; and Jennie Phillips. I am so honored to count you all among my friends and am so thankful for your unending support.

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NOMENCLATURE

Age	<i>The Age of Innocence</i>
AI	<i>The Architectural Imagination of Edith Wharton: Gender, Class, and Power in the Progressive Era</i>
AMH	<i>The American Woman's Home: or, Principles of Domestic Science</i>
AP	<i>Austin Phelps: A Memoir</i>
Avis	<i>The Story of Avis</i>
CL	<i>Chapters From a Life</i>
Geography	"The Geography of Gender in <i>The House of Mirth</i> "
FW	<i>The First Woman of the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child</i>
HM	<i>The House of Mirth</i>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mrs. Shelby appeared on the balcony, beckoning to [Sam]. [He] approached with as good a determination to pay court as did ever suitor after a vacant place at St. James' or Washington. . .
 'Well, Sam, you are to go with Mr. Haley, to show him the road, and help him. Be careful of the horses, Sam; you know Jerry was a little lame last week; *don't ride them too fast.*' Mrs. Shelby spoke the last words with a low voice, and strong emphasis.

--Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

In this passage from Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852, Stowe places Mrs. Shelby, the wife of a prominent Kentucky slaveholder, in an architecturally ambiguous location. In this scene, Mrs. Shelby suddenly appears on the balcony, which is attached to her private bedroom, almost out of nowhere. She orders one of her husband's slaves Sam to help Mr. Haley, a slave trader, find two runaway slaves. The runaways are Eliza, who is Mrs. Shelby's maid and has been with Mrs. Shelby for years, and Eliza's five-year-old son Harry; Mr. Shelby sold both Eliza and Harry to Mr. Haley the day before, in an attempt to pay off a substantial debt he owed Haley. From the balcony, Mrs. Shelby instructs Sam to stay out of the chaos the search has caused. Her directions to Sam seem to be proper, as she explicitly tells him to take special care of the horses, which are known to be temperamental, lest he frighten them and they run off. Her tone and Stowe's use of italics, however, suggest Mrs. Shelby is actually behaving improperly, as she implicitly instructs Sam to be careless with the horses because doing so will delay Haley's departure and allow Eliza and her son to get safely away from the Shelby plantation.

This dissertation follows the style of *African American Review*.

That Mrs. Shelby relays her instructions from the balcony is as important as the instructions themselves. Architecturally speaking, a balcony is neither a public nor a private space; it exists somewhere between the public and private realms.¹ Although a balcony usually can only be reached from the interior, private spaces of the home, typically it can be viewed publicly. Standing on her private balcony, which she has accessed from her bedroom, Mrs. Shelby is, nonetheless, standing before everyone on the plantation.² She is in what I call an interstitial space, a space that is neither wholly public nor wholly private. She uses the interstitiality of the balcony to her advantage. She seemingly orders Sam to help Haley, although her tone implies that Sam is to delay Haley any way he can. Because she is on her private balcony, in full view of Haley, her husband, and the entire plantation, her directions to Sam, in spite of her tone and body language, cannot be contradicted. She appears to have obeyed both her husband, who has instructed her not to interfere with Haley (Stowe 28), and the boundaries of the private sphere. In actuality, Mrs. Shelby has manipulated an interstitial space to aid Eliza and her son without appearing to do so. She has conflated the public and private realms, creating a space, albeit a temporary one, where she can openly disobey both her husband and social convention without fearing any reprisal.

Nineteenth-century American literature written by women is rife with such spaces. Interstitial spaces are key locations, both physical and metaphorical, where women can think, feel, write, and confront life on their own terms. More often than not, such spaces have been approached from vantages similar to those proposed by Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929). Woolf advocated that “[a] woman must have a . . . room of her own” (4). With this statement, Woolf boldly declares that such spaces are imperative for women to overcome the “prejudices and passions” that have plagued them for centuries (5). While Woolf ostensibly means “a room of her own” to refer to a specific architectural location where a woman can think,

write, and even contemplate her feelings in private, she also seems to refer to metaphoric spaces: the space, wherever it may be, for a woman to be creative, to record her thoughts, to claim her own voice, and to direct the outcome of her life on her own terms. Woolf's call, however, focuses exclusively on English women writers of the nineteenth century, arguing that if writers such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Charlotte Bronte had access to physical and metaphoric spaces of their own they could have written great books instead of "good ones" (67). While Woolf's argument is certainly valid and applicable to American women writers as well as English, her view of space and women's need for it, is somewhat limited. Indeed, Woolf explicitly connects space to women's need for money,³ and thus, her definition of space only applies to middle- and upper-class white women who have ready access both to money and to space. Woolf does not consider women who must work outside of their homes in order to support their families, not does she consider marginalized women whose race and class may prevent them from having access to the types of spaces or the amount of money she defines as essential. Further, Woolf seems to assume that women will be able to locate spaces of their own with relative ease, either by using rooms in their homes or by renting rooms removed from their homes with the money she argues they must have. She fails to take into account that many women struggle to locate such spaces and money and that others may have to manipulate the boundaries of existing locations to claim spaces for themselves. Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw are two women, who successfully located spaces of their own, who are necessarily excluded by Woolf's narrow definition of space.

Lee and Elaw were both free, working-class African American women living in the mid-nineteenth century. Both struggled to find their respective places in an American society that limited their abilities to live and work as they chose because of their race, class, and gender. Finally, both believed they had been sanctified by God and called to preach publicly about their

individual conversion experiences. Lee and Elaw had to construct new spaces for themselves so that they could fulfill what they saw as their God-sanctioned missions. In doing so, Elaw and Lee defied nineteenth-century religious convention, which dictated that women, especially African American women, could not preach in public. Because they could not share their stories in churches or other traditional venues, nor could they minister to congregations in any official capacity, both women employed whatever spaces that were available to them. For example, Lee made use of her minister's wife's parlor to share her very private story of conversion (Lee 47). Following the model established by other itinerant preachers, Elaw often made use of outdoor spaces to speak about her experiences (Elaw 79, 80). Neither of the spaces that Lee and Elaw used could be definitively categorized as either public or private. Thus, Elaw and Lee manipulated the porous boundaries of spaces that resulted in an overlap of the public and private spheres to fulfill their calling to preach about their religious and spiritual experiences.

Elaw and Lee, much like Stowe's fictional Mrs. Shelby, creatively constructed interstitial spaces of their own. In doing so, these women alter Woolf's definition of space, a definition that has influenced academic discourse extensively and has promoted a fissure between separate spheres ideology and architectural history. While most critics accept that the notion of separate spheres is largely theoretical and that the spheres were never as separate as originally thought, few, if any, critics seem to recognize that these divisions between public and private, masculine feminine spaces, were architectural realities. Therefore, I consider space primarily through the concept of interstitiality in an attempt to highlight the ambiguous nature of most spaces to which women had access—spaces that cannot be defined as one thing or another. Further, I rely upon the term interstitial to analyze the numerous metaphoric spaces nineteenth-century American women writers created and claimed for themselves and their female characters.

For the purposes of my project, I define space as an in-between location that enables an individual to consider her life free from the demands of family or the conventions of society. Such locations can be actual physical locations, such as a field, a porch, a garden, or even an entire country, or they can be metaphoric locations, such as a narrative or a painting. To some extent, I rely on Doreen Massey's definition of space: space is "the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (9). Thus, I see space as constructed and defined by a person's relationship with others as well as by her relationship with the function of the space. For example, the characters I focus on each rely on specific spaces in their attempts to achieve their goals of directing the outcome of their own lives. The spaces they rely on, however, are not solely of their own making. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *Avis Dobell* is able to claim outdoor locations as private spaces because her friends and family recognize and respect her need to occupy such spaces on her own terms. Harriet Jacobs's *Linda Brent* finds the garret space above her grandmother's storage shed because her family determines it is the best hiding place for her; had they not seen the potential value of the garret, Brent would not have been able to use the interstitiality of the space to her advantage by transforming it into a site of resistance. For Edith Wharton's *Lily Bart*, the spaces she has—and does not have—access to are largely determined by her position as an unmarried woman; therefore, Lily has to make the most of interstitial spaces because she is only granted limited control over more clearly defined spaces. Thus, to some degree, space is "always under construction" (Massey 9).

Interstitial spaces, then, are "always in the process of being made" (9), and they are empowering precisely because they are malleable and easily manipulated. Specific spaces, such as Avis's studio or Brent's garret, may have finite dimensions, but spaces can be transformed and changed to meet the needs of the individual occupying them. Further, spaces, such as

narrative spaces, can be imagined and created—as if out of nothing—to enable individuals to claim spaces of their own when they do not have access to physical, architectural spaces of their own.

Interstitial spaces are far from ideal, however. These spaces often serve distinct architectural objectives, which cannot be easily adapted to other purposes. Further, they can often be accessed by many people and the individuals who need them the most may struggle to adapt such spaces to their own needs. While interstitial spaces can be empowering and freeing, they also represent the limitations facing the individuals who most often locate and inhabit such spaces. These individuals create and claim interstitial spaces because their ability to occupy other, more clearly defined spaces on their own terms is severely restricted, often due to their race, their gender, or their class—or a combination of these factors.

All interstitial spaces, however, whether outwardly public or private, can be manipulated and transformed into something quite different from what they were originally intended. In another example from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mrs. Bird's private parlor becomes an interstitial space as she chastises her husband for supporting the Fugitive Slave Law: "You ought to be ashamed, John! Poor, homeless, houseless creatures! It's a shameful, wicked, abominable law, and I'll break it, for one, the first time I get a chance" (44). Here, Mrs. Bird transforms her parlor into a public space, as she makes an appeal that is both emotional and political. Mrs. Bird uses her parlor, a space that is typically defined as feminine and private,⁴ to express her opinion on a political matter because she has no other space in which to do so. Thus, her parlor becomes an interstitial space because she manipulates its boundaries so that she can share her views on a public matter in a private space, something she would be largely unable to do in a space that was clearly marked as masculine or public. Although she and her husband are in the privacy of their own parlor, they enter a public space as soon as the discussion becomes political. Mrs. Bird

manipulates domestic ideology, which dictates she is in control of her home, in an attempt to change her husband's mind regarding a political issue.

Many American women writers of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries rely upon the manipulation of space to express their views, creating interstitial spaces either for their fictional heroines or themselves—or in some cases, for both—in their writings. Catharine Maria Sedgwick is among the first. In her 1824 novel *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in the Massachusetts*, Sedgwick explores how race and gender affects colonial American society. Sedgwick conflates public and private spaces, creating interstitial spaces for the characters Hope and Magawisca to use to their advantage. Both Hope and Magawisca repeatedly claim porches, stairways, and even the forest as interstitial spaces; in these spaces, specifically the porch of Governor Winthrop's home, they are able to meet and to discuss their past and future. By meeting on the porch, a space that is both public and private, late at night, Hope and Magawisca transgress their prescribed gender roles, which dictate that neither white nor Native American women should interfere with the business of men.⁵ On the porch, they discuss Hope's sister's choice to stay with Magawisca's tribe, and their position on the porch enables them to have a private discussion about public matters. They are able to have this discussion on the Winthrops' porch because it is a space they both feel comfortable in, as interstitial nature of the porch offers them some safety as Magawisca can flee to the nearby forest and Hope can slip into the house if anyone interrupts them (183-91). In *Our Nig; or, Sketches in the Life of a Free Black*, published in 1859, Harriet E. Wilson has her protagonist Frado challenge Mrs. Bellmont, her cruel mistress, in the yard surrounding the Bellmont home (58). The yard is interstitial because, although public, it is only accessible to people on the Bellmont property. Further, its removal from the private, domestic spaces of the home places it beyond the control of Mrs. Bellmont; thus, Frado feels empowered by the ambiguity of the space and transforms it into a site of

resistance. Sara Willis Parton's ("Fanny Fern's") *Ruth Hall*, in her 1854 novel of the same name, creates an interstitial space where she can support her family without fully entering the public realm. By writing for women's newspapers and magazines, Ruth is able to stay home and support her children, but she also contributes to the public debate on issues such as motherhood, education, and domesticity through her writing (172, 209). In these and many other examples, nineteenth-century American women convert both public and private spaces into interstitial spaces out of a desire and often a necessity to claim spaces of their own beyond the domestic realm.

In this dissertation, I examine the ways four nineteenth-century American women writers, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Harriet E. Wilson, Harriet Jacobs, and Edith Wharton, create, claim, and command interstitial spaces and demonstrate how they use such spaces to express their own views, manipulate the tenuous divisions between the public and private realms, and resist social and familial limitations. I focus specifically on the ways these writers create interstitial spaces and how such spaces become integral to their attempts to challenge conventions. I argue that in most cases interstitial spaces are positive, as they enable the writers and their fictional characters to resist oppression and agitate for change, both at the local and national level. In some cases, however, interstitial spaces are negative and can be as confining and limiting as the domestic ideology they seek to challenge. Female characters such as Wharton's Lily Bart, who live almost exclusively in interstitial spaces, are often unable to escape interstitiality. These characters, whether out of an inability to decide their own fates, to recognize their own agency, or to negotiate the boundaries of interstitial spaces to their advantage often become victims to their environments and to interstitiality itself. In my dissertation, then, I examine the various ways nineteenth-century American women writers made

use of interstitial spaces, paying particular attention to the ways race and class affect a writer's ability to create, to manipulate, and to command interstitial spaces.

Through interstitial spaces, women, particularly women living and writing in America between the 1850s and the turn of the twentieth century, were able to challenge both familial and social conventions regarding gender and space. Interstitial spaces, both metaphoric and physical, are so prevalent during this time period and to the four authors who are the focus of this project because women of all backgrounds and classes, sought to negotiate the ideological separation of spheres as well as the reality that no such strict separation existed.⁶ Further, the presence of interstitial spaces reveals the disparity between the porous boundary that existed between the public and private spheres and the strict architectural boundaries that divided public spaces from private spaces, masculine ones from feminine ones. While the boundaries between the metaphorical public and private realms were largely imagined and theoretical, the spatial and architectural limitations that women faced were not. Thus, I argue that women used interstitial spaces as a way to resist both the spatial and social limitations they faced. My project further addresses what I see as a lack in the ongoing critical debate surrounding separate spheres ideology and the work being done in nineteenth-century American architectural history. Many literary critics, including Milette Shamir, Dolores Hayden, Lora Romero and John Modellmog, examine literature through the lens of architectural theory and history. These critics in particular consider architecture's impact upon notions of public and private spaces and examine the ways architectural ideals are represented in literature. While architectural historians, such as Andrew Alpern, Elizabeth Collins Cromley, and Elizabeth Hawes, have compiled extensive histories of American architecture their histories often do not consider the changing view of separate spheres ideology upon architectural developments during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

1.1 The Overlapping Spheres

In his 1835 book *Democracy in America*, French writer Alexis de Tocqueville published his observations on American society, including his thoughts on the status of women. He asserts “Americans have applied to the sexes the great principle of political economy which governs the manufactures of our age, by carefully dividing the duties of man from those of woman” (259). De Tocqueville goes on to describe how complete this division is and how it influenced virtually every aspect of American society:

In no country has such constant care been taken as in America to trace two clearly distinct lines of action for the two sexes, and to make them keep pace one with the other, but in two pathways which are always different. American women never manage the outward concerns of the family, or conduct a business, or take a part in political life; nor are they, on the other hand, ever compelled to perform the rough labour of the fields, or to make any of those laborious exertions which demand the exertion of physical strength . . . If, on the one hand, an American woman cannot escape from the quiet circle of domestic employments, she is never forced, on the other hand, to go beyond it. (sic 259)

The segment of upper-class American society⁷ that de Tocqueville wrote about clearly adhered to some form of separate spheres ideology. Indeed, de Tocqueville’s descriptions recalls images of women in their sitting rooms knitting lace, practicing their French, and playing the pianoforte while waiting for their husbands, fathers, and brothers to return from the fields, the office, or the state house. As Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher point out in the Introduction to their groundbreaking work *No More Separate Spheres!*, de Tocqueville’s discussion of American women fits squarely with historians’ and literary scholars’ conceptions of the separation of public and private: the men governed the public realm while women willingly confined

themselves to the private (9). In fact, de Tocqueville's discussion of nineteenth-century American women actually became the basis of the separate spheres model that predominated historical and literary studies of nineteenth-century America from the 1940s through the late 1970s and early 1980s (9). Historian Linda K. Kerber explains the critical interest and acceptance of de Tocqueville by asserting that, in post-World War II America, *Democracy in America* was the only classic book "read by students of American history that seriously examined the situation of women in American society" ("Separate Spheres" 29).

Having little else to go on, historians and literary critics alike accepted de Tocqueville's description of an American society that was strictly bifurcated along gender lines as well as public and private spheres. As Davidson and Hatcher note, the separate spheres model was so readily accepted because it reinforced contemporary restrictions placed upon American women of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s; after all, the separate spheres model explained:

what was happening, ideologically, in the American 1950s as white, middle-class women (who had the vote, could hold elected office, and had worked in factories and boardrooms during the war) were being encouraged to return to their domestic roles as wives of returning GIs. One could even say that a generation of women historians who felt marginalized by the neglect of women's history used the separate spheres metaphor to write about neglected women of a previous century. (10)

Thus, the separate spheres model became widely accepted as the standard way to examine "the legal, institutional, occupational, and affective limitations placed upon women" (10). Critics such as Barbara Welter and Gerda Lerner, through their analyses of what Welter defined as "The Cult of True Womanhood," argued that women's seclusion in the domestic sphere "subordinated and devalued them" (10). The early critics studying the separate spheres model saw this division

as total, and they frequently failed to recognize that women, particularly white, middle- and upper-class women, were often empowered by their roles in the domestic sphere and that the separation of spheres was not as complete as de Tocqueville originally observed.

As Milette Shamir notes, however, most scholarship written during the 1960s, '70s, and early '80s, strictly adhered to separate spheres ideology. Early feminist scholars repeatedly reaffirmed the divisions between the public and private spheres, equating “the private sphere with womanhood and [the public sphere] with the exterior world of politics and the marketplace,” locations that typically did not welcome women (24). Rather than question the dominant ideology of domestic discourse, many scholars effectively limited nineteenth-century women to the domestic realm, as they asserted that women rarely entered the public sphere and only did so out of economic necessity rather than personal desire. In fact, as many critics have since noted, the separation was largely imagined and, as Homi Bhabha asserts in *The Location of Culture*, theoretical (10).

That so many twentieth-century critics failed to recognize the arbitrariness of the separate spheres model is not surprising given how many nineteenth-century women themselves argued for the benefits of keeping the spheres divided. The most noted nineteenth-century advocate of separate spheres ideology was domestic reformer Catharine Beecher. As I discuss throughout my project, Beecher argued for what Dolores Hayden calls “female dominance in the home” (55). Indeed, Hayden describes Beecher as something of a revolutionary; Beecher rejected earlier American views on domestic economy, which “assumed that men maintained control of the typical middle-class household, including women, children, and servants . . . but Beecher broke with this tradition tentatively in the [*Treatise on Domestic Economy*] and decisively in *The American Woman's Home*” (55).⁸ Beecher was among the first to advocate that women's “greater capacity for self-sacrifice entitled [them] to rule the home. She argued in

favor of the physical and social separation of the population into the female-dominated sphere of home-life . . . and the male-dominated sphere of work and aggressive competition” (55-6).

Indeed, Beecher argued that American women should have no interest or concern in civil and political affairs “except so far as they sympathize with their family and personal friends” (*Treatise* 9). Women, however, do have “a superior influence” concerning all “matters pertaining to the education of their children, in selection and support of a clergyman, in all benevolent enterprises, and in all questions relating to morals or manners” (9). Thus, Beecher positioned herself as a domestic feminist, advocating that women were empowered by their roles as wives and mothers and that they should seek to extend their power within the private sphere. Beecher, however, fails to account for women who desire lives beyond the private sphere or for women whose societal roles prevent them from wielding any power within the private sphere even if they wish to follow the path that Beecher outlined for women. In fact, Beecher does not recognize any women who do not fit within her clearly delineated definition of women as “self-sacrificing,” “morally superior,” and domestically empowered (Hayden 55).

In contrast to Beecher, domestic reformer and journalist Kate Gannett Wells did realize that, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, many American women were benefitting from the growing opportunities available to them and that many wanted to experience life beyond the domestic sphere. In her essay “The Transitional Woman,” which was published in *Atlantic Monthly*’s December 1880 volume, Wells writes that many women have found that “however dear the home is, they can exist without it”; women are, thus, beginning to “ask, in their midnight musings, why it should be right for a man to accept a position which the woman, on account of her home, must refuse. The query itself would not have arisen half a century since” (819). From this passage, it appears as though Wells is glad that American society has changed to such an extent that more women are able to seek fulfillment beyond the boundaries of the

private sphere. Wells, however, goes on to bemoan these changes and to openly critique any woman who does not devote herself solely to running a home for her family. As Wells argues, “to be a good housekeeper, an anxious mother, an obedient wife” is no longer the ultimate desire for many American women, and thus, “women do not care for their home[s] as they did” because “it is no longer the focus of *all* their endeavors” (821).⁹ Inherent in Wells’s argument is the belief that women should want to be wives and mothers, women should be fulfilled, emotionally and intellectually, by the work they perform for their families, and women should not want or even need spaces of their own either within or outside their homes in order to be happy.

Unlike Beecher, who never considered women who wanted careers or to live on their own, Wells appears to struggle with women’s changing roles, and she ends up questioning the very progress that she herself benefits from.¹⁰ On the one hand she recognizes that women have not experienced the same freedoms as men, conceding that “women’s past condition has not been satisfactory to herself” (823), yet she criticizes women who seek to expand their roles beyond the home, as she reminds her readers that women must sublimate their own needs for the good of their families and, by extension, the American nation as a whole. Thus, Wells begins the article seemingly supportive of women who want roles outside the home, but she concludes by calling for women to remain in their traditional roles, for women to stop challenging their current positions, and for them to be happy with the status quo. She does acknowledge that there are many women who are unhappy being only “good housekeeper[s], . . . anxious mother[s], . . . [and] obedient wi[ves],” and she comments favorably on women who manage both a family and a career (823). Wells argues, however, that women who eschew marriage and children altogether are “purely selfish” (823). Wells then only accounts for women who want both a family and a career. She fails to acknowledge that there are women who do not want to marry

and have children. Wells contends that any woman who wants more “for [her] own sake” is not only a failure as a wife and a mother, but as a woman (823).

By describing such women as failures, Wells seeks to reinscribe women within the domestic sphere, limiting their familial and social roles to that of wife and mother. Wells, and others who shared her views, adheres to a discourse of womanhood that never really existed, however. In her revised introduction to *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002), Mary Kelley argues against “a strict demarcation between public and private spheres,” claiming “the boundaries [between the two spheres] are far more porous than the binary category allows” (xii). Indeed, as Kelley suggests, nineteenth-century women seemed to be more aware of these porous boundaries than many twentieth-century critics, as many nineteenth-century women (particularly writers, artists, and activists) willingly traversed the divide between the two spheres. Kelley does maintain, however, that women who led public lives in the nineteenth century were the exception rather than the rule. Following

the dominant prescription governing all female lives in the nineteenth century — and for that matter, before and after as well, from the colonial period into the twentieth century — a “happy woman” was supposed to be the woman who married, had children, managed a household, and was materially supported by her husband. (139)

Kelley’s description refers to the ideal nineteenth-century woman, and she correctly notes that many women who entered the public sphere typically did so reluctantly. Many women, including writers like Parton, E.D.E.N. Southworth, and Susan Warner, were forced to enter the public sphere more out of economic necessity than from a true desire to transgress the boundaries of the private realm. She argues that these writers in particular “were uncomfortable in the world beyond the home. At best they felt ambivalent [about the fame they achieved as

writers], at worst they [felt that they] simply did not belong there” (29). While Kelley is correct in her assessment of these particular authors, she does not fully account for women writers who actively sought roles in the public sphere, women such as Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Louisa May Alcott, and Frances E.W. Harper, or for women who were forced into the public sphere by virtue of their race and class, such as Wilson and Jacobs.

Many women, including Stowe, Jacobs, and Harper, wrote as a way to enter the public sphere and engage in public, political debates. Their purpose in writing was, as Jane Tompkins suggests, “to reorganize culture from the woman’s point of view” (124). The need to reorganize American culture seems particularly salient for African American, Asian American, and Native American women writers, for whom, as Elizabeth Ammons, Hazel Carby, and Claudia Tate, among others, point out, the notions of true womanhood and the public/private dichotomy were not always applicable (Ammons 7, Carby 6, Tate 4).

Many women of color and working-class women never found the domestic sphere empowering. They were forced to enter the public sphere to support their families or simply to survive the harsh reality of their lives; for example, enslaved and formerly enslaved women were unable to adhere to the strict codes of the private sphere that most white women were able to follow and even relied upon as a means of protecting their virtue. In fact, as Ammons asserts,

middle-class black women at the turn of the century were not the daughters of restless matrons rebelling against a restrictive Victorian ideal of True Womanhood. Most were the daughters or granddaughters of slaves. They descended from women whom racist America had defined as the complete antithesis of the True Woman—the female not as pure moral paragon, but as animal: woman as laborer and breeder . . . The middle-class black woman at the

turn of the century was not busy casting off a constricting ideal of Victorian femininity. She had never been included in it in the first place. (7-8)

Ammons correctly points to the racial limitations of separate spheres ideology: it empowered a select group of women—white middle- and upper-class women. Although her comments specifically address the ways the separate spheres model did not account for African American women, her analysis could easily be applied to other marginalized groups of nineteenth-century women. As material culture scholar Henry Glassie notes, “we must dispense with . . . the familiar dichotomy of the public and private,” as that dichotomy simply did not exist for everyone (261).

Such women, I contend, often wrote as a means to express their frustration at a system that did not include them; thus, they often equated writing with social and political activism. Certainly the four women who are the focus of this project viewed their writing as a way to engage with contemporary discourses of race, class, womanhood, and public and private space. Thus, my project is situated in what Davidson and Hatcher have defined as “post-separate spheres criticism” (12). Although my conception of interstitial spaces is predicated on the belief that some separation of spheres did exist, it does not assume that such separations were strict or uniform. It also does not take for granted that all women, regardless of race or class, are powerless, nor does it presuppose that “powerlessness *equals* virtue” (12).¹¹ As Davidson and Hatcher assert,

Power is not uniformly distributed, neither is virtue. The same nineteenth-century middle class woman unfairly excluded from the world of public politics might well be a tyrant to the slave or indentured servant who cleans her home and tends her children. Post-separate spheres criticism asks us to attend to those shifting dynamics of power and privilege. It insists that gender is a significant

contributor to human identity, but that it does not encompass, stand in for, obviate, or trump all other factors. (12)

Following their definition of post- separate spheres criticism, then, I do not argue that the authors or characters I consider create and claim interstitial spaces solely because they are women.

While their position as women does contribute greatly to their need for such spaces, they also rely upon interstitial spaces because of the limitations they faced due to their race, class, and specific positions in society. For example, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's protagonist Avis Dobell, who is the focus of this dissertation's section two must seek out interstitial spaces to fulfill her desire to become a professional artist, a desire that, while at odds with her gendered position in society, is uniquely hers. To achieve their desire to live life on their own terms, these women sought to claim spaces of their own, and they did this primarily through manipulating and negotiating the spaces, both physical and architectural, they could readily access. As cultural geographer Doreen Massey notes, the "spatial is political" as individuals manipulate the spaces to which they are limited (9). The manipulation and transformation of space becomes a way for women "to contribute to political arguments" and allows women to re-imagine themselves and the spaces in which they live (9). By writing about space and its role in their lives, many nineteenth-century American women attempted to improve their positions in American society. Thus, many women writers sought to bring the private sphere into the public (and vice versa) and create a place for themselves in the public realm in an attempt to reject the racist, classist, and gender limitations they faced.

As Gillian Rose asserts, most critics assume that "space is understood as knowable" (366). By examining the metaphoric aspects of space and considering other types of space (such as narrative space and textual space), I contend that space, while perhaps finite in its physical dimensions, is infinitely changeable and malleable, and I seek to address a lack in nineteenth

century studies. I argue that through similar tactics, women writers from diverse backgrounds manipulate space to create, claim, and control spaces of their own. In doing so, many of these women are openly resisting the domestic ideology of the period and are seeking to develop an ideology that better addresses the needs and desires of all nineteenth-century American women.

1.2 Interstitial Spaces and Home Design in Nineteenth-Century America

Despite the reality that the public and private spheres were not as strictly divided as many nineteenth-century domestic reformers would have us believe, public and private spaces were often clearly delineated in the structure of the homes of most Americans. In fact, architectural historian Clifford Edward Clark, Jr. contends that “[n]owhere did the ideal-middle class house at mid-century fit more closely with the vision of the family than in the preoccupation with the separation of ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres” (42). The separation of space into public and private represented a distinct shift in home design from the Republican to the Antebellum periods.¹² Most American homes in the Republican period reflected the belief that Americans were “interdependent . . . sharing work, education, [and] worship” (11). An individual family and its home would often fulfill multiple roles within a community, “serv[ing] as a church, a school, a business, a hospital, an orphanage” (29). Thus, the open design of most Republican homes emphasized shared and multi-purpose spaces, rather than designating each room as specifically public or private.

Milette Shamir cites the Greek Revival style, “a principle of design prescribing square, open spaces ornamented by capitals, pediments, pilasters, and porticoes,” as the most frequently used architectural style of the Republican period (3). According to both Shamir and Clark, the Greek Revival style reflected “the ideal of a balanced and well-ordered family” and a community working toward shared purposes (Clark 12). In fact, Greek Revival architecture “inspired the design of private homes and public buildings alike and thus rendered private space virtually

indistinguishable from public space” (Shamir 3). While the exteriors of private homes differed little from those of public buildings, such as town halls and churches, the interiors reflected the Republican values of common purposes and shared responsibilities. Thus, most “colonial and early-republic Americans, with slight regional variations, lived in simple frame houses of a similar design” (28). The house typically included a main floor that had “a large single room or a hall and a parlor,” where the majority of daily activities occurred, including domestic work, household chores, and entertaining guests (28). The room’s flexibility was “reflected in the different names applied to the same space”; this multi-purpose room was often referred to as “the *hall, great room, outer room, dwelling room, fire-room*, or even ‘house’” (Clark 12).¹³ The hall was the center of family life and was used for everything from cooking and dining to candle making, spinning, and amusements. The great hall was arranged around a central fireplace, whose chimney sustained the second floor, where the family and guests typically slept. This simple interior plan, which can be found in urban row houses and farmhouses alike, was imported by seventeenth-century English settlers and remained largely unchanged throughout the colonial and Republican periods and well into the mid-nineteenth century. Ostensibly, the upstairs was considered more private than the public downstairs, but “the boundary between them was often blurred” as each room served a variety of purposes (Shamir 28). Houses of the colonial and early-Republican periods were distinguished by “a production-oriented, functional, and communal space that made few accommodations for individual privacy” (29). Shamir asserts that this design “was particularly well suited to the form of patriarchy that characterized colonial America,” a form in which the father was seen as the unquestioned head of the household (29). In a home that combined activities and discouraged individual privacy, the father’s power was both “visible and direct” (30). By the mid-nineteenth century, however, both the home and the American family had begun to change. The father was increasingly expected

to take on public roles outside the home, and the home itself was no longer expected to serve “as a church, a school, a business, [or] a hospital” as well as a home (Clark 29). As public agencies took the responsibilities away from individual families, families and homes assumed more specialized responsibilities, and the interior plans of homes began to reflect these changes.

The new interior plan reflected the growing belief that “the household should be a refuge from the outside world, a fortress designed to protect, nurture, and strengthen the individuals within it” (Clark 29). Reflecting this relatively new emphasis on individuality, the interior plans were “characterized by increased consideration for privacy and by the allocation of specialized spaces to each member of the household” (Shamir 30). Spaces gradually came to be marked as clearly public or private, and home design began to reflect these changes. Kitchens and all associated work were separated from the great hall and placed in “the rear of the house, sometimes even in the basement” (Clark 42). In fact, as both Clark and Shamir note, kitchens were often placed in separate buildings, away from the primary space of the home (Clark 62, Shamir 42).¹⁴ If a family could afford to have servants, “a back staircase was put in to give them access to the kitchen and keep them out of sight” (42). The upstairs and downstairs also became more clearly divided by making the main staircase larger and more elaborate, marking the “boundary between a wholly private upstairs and a more-open downstairs” (Shamir 30). The staircase typically “occupied a prominent position in the front entrance hall,” making it a semi-public location as anyone who entered the home did so within full view of it; social convention, however, construed it as a semi-private space because the stairs could only be used by family members (Clark 42). As the upstairs became seen as a private space for the family, it became common for it to be separated into several bedrooms, allowing individual family members to have their own room and, therefore, more privacy. Beds and other accessories were moved upstairs, and the main floor was no longer composed of only a great room or a hall and a parlor

where all daily activities were conducted. Increasingly it included “a parlor and a study, accompanied by a kitchen . . . and often an adjacent dining room . . . Rooms were newly designed to accommodate a precise function,” rather than to address the needs of the entire family (Shamir 30). While the new plan reflects a move toward a marital relationship based on more equality and less on the husband’s complete authority, it also reflects a connection between architecture and the changing view of gender roles. Thus, as wives were expected to take more control of the physical spaces of the home while husbands began working outside the home in spaces ostensibly coded as public, architects and domestic reforms argued that husbands and wives each needed spaces of their own within their homes. Following the typical description of homes and gendered roles, women were given kitchens, parlors,¹⁵ and sitting rooms, while men claimed studies and dens for themselves.¹⁶

As women were gradually given more control over the home and men left the home behind to work in more public settings, these changes were enhanced as “production was gradually extracted from the private sphere” (Shamir 30), particularly in the homes of upper and middle-class families. All activities that had previously occurred in the great room were now performed in specific locations, primarily the kitchen or outbuildings. Additionally, the central chimney was replaced by a middle hallway, further dividing the downstairs into separate rooms (30). This change enabled certain spaces to be designated as semi-public, including the parlor. As its location and “the elaborate suggestions for its furnishings implied,” the parlor was a public space meant to be used for social calls, gatherings, and display, not relaxation. The advent of the parlor gave families a location to mark important events, such as births, baptisms, weddings, and even funerals (Clark 42).

These divisions of public and private also extended to the exterior of homes as well. As Clark asserts, by the ante- and post-bellum periods, “a large front lawn had become an important

symbol of status for the well-to-do, middle-class family, a means of extending the formal public spaces of a house beyond the front rooms” (43). The front lawn would be, most likely, connected to the main entrance of the home, and thus, it would be an entirely public space, even as it marked the transition from the wholly public world of the street to the private world of the home’s interior. In contrast, the service parts of the house, including any barns, stables, or kitchen gardens, were concealed and would have been connected to the more private portions of the home, specifically a kitchen. These spaces “were tastefully hidden behind a screen of evergreen trees or other plantings,” which served to render public spaces somewhat private (43). Indeed, nineteenth-century architect Andrew Jackson Downing advocated positioning the kitchen, the kitchen gardens, and any outbuildings “upon a screened or blind side [of the property], or one that can be easily concealed by planting. There should be a room for a kitchen yard or court, connected with a passage or a short path to the stable, and quite turned away from the lawn or entrance side of the house” (271). Exterior spaces were further divided between servants and family members, as each group often had their own back porches “where they could enjoy the outdoors without being seen” (Clark 43). Thus, almost every space in American homes built between 1830 and the turn-of-the-twentieth century was categorized as either public or private, although such designations were not permanent and were often changed to suit the needs of individual families.

There were spaces, however, that could not be easily categorized. Clark and Shamir both identify hallways, entryways, and staircases as spaces that could not be clearly defined as either public or private. Shamir notes that hallways and stairways connected public and private spaces (30), while Clark describes the front hallway as “mediat[ing]” between public and private spaces (44). Although Shamir does not analyze these spaces in any detail, Clark argues that this “third category of spaces” served to maintain “the privacy and specialized function of other

spaces” (44, 45). While Clark’s discussion of such spaces ends here, he seems to envision hallways, stairways, and entryways as neither wholly public nor wholly private, keeping with my definition of interstitial spaces. He further suggests that such spaces often separated the more masculine spaces of the home from the more feminine ones.

As American society became more focused on the economic market, women, especially middle- and upper-class women, were granted greater domestic autonomy. While men were expected to support their families by working in the commercial world, the women were expected “to dominate at home,” resulting in what many began to see as a separation of spheres (Clark 32). Kerber takes Clarke’s comments regarding the influence the market economy had on gender roles further, arguing that “the phrase ‘separate spheres’ is a metaphor for complex power relations in social and economic contexts” (47-8). The changes in American gender roles reflected these social and economic contexts. Generally, women were given control over managing their homes and their children, including most economic aspects of household management. Men were still seen as the head of the household, but, to some degree, they were also expected to acquiesce to their wives’ power in the home. In so doing, men began to claim private spaces in the home for their own personal use.

Although the division between the public and private spheres was much more porous and fluid than scholars of nineteenth-century history, literature, and culture originally thought, the divisions present in domestic interiors were increasingly dependent upon notions of gender and separate spheres ideology throughout the mid- to late-nineteenth century. Such divisions represented what Shamir describes as “the goal of Victorian domestic architecture . . . to ‘protect the womanliness of women and encourage the manliness of men’” (Girouard as cited by Shamir 30).¹⁷ This goal was achieved by neatly dividing the spaces of the home into public and private, masculine and feminine spaces. This notion of “gendered spaces was adopted initially from the

design of aristocratic British mansions, a designed that conceived parlors, breakfast rooms, and boudoirs as the lady's realm" (Shamir 32). American domestic reformers, including Catharine Beecher and Melusina Fay Pierce, extended these aristocratic divisions to place the kitchen and the parlor under the woman's domain. In fact, Beecher and Pierce viewed the division of spaces along gender lines as empowering and advocated that women have "control over all aspects of domestic life" (Hayden 55). Their belief that women must control and manage the home in order to train their children and shelter their men did not keep them from agreeing that men needed private spaces within their own homes; thus, "studies, libraries, . . . and billiard rooms" were conceived as the man's domain (Shamir 32). Despite these fairly strict divisions, however, the spaces were not allocated equally. While men's spaces, specifically their studies, were seen as wholly private, at least in the sense that their wives and children were expected to ask permission before entering them, parlors were much more public as they were designed to be gathering places for both men and women "in pursuit of familial intimacy or social pleasures" (32). Thus, women were required to ask permission before entering their husbands' private studies, despite the common belief that women were most empowered within their own homes, but men did not have to seek their wives' permission to enter their parlors. This clear division of space limited the amount of power women actually held over any one space. Therefore, women, particularly women who either had limited access to private spaces or did not feel comfortable in spaces traditionally coded as feminine, sought out alternative or interstitial spaces as a means to empower themselves and, often, as a way to claim control over their own lives.

This dissertation examines the representation and the manipulation of interstitial spaces in works by nineteenth-century American women. While much has been written about masculine and feminine architectural spaces, less has been written about interstitial spaces. Indeed, although numerous critics, Tompkins, Lori Merish, and Gillian Brown among them, note that

women frequently manipulate public and private spaces to their advantage, as of yet no one has devoted a full-length study to the presence of such manipulation in literature. Further, no other critic uses the term *interstitial* to describe the spaces that exist both in the public and private realms or to describe the transformation in physical or metaphorical spaces that occur because of spatial and rhetorical manipulation. Critic Carla L. Peterson does, however, use the term *liminal space* to describe, “that moment and place in which an individual, separated from society, comes to be ‘betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial’” (Turner as quoted in Peterson 17). Like the *interstitial spaces* I examine, Peterson’s *liminal spaces* offer women, specifically African American women, opportunities to transform themselves and to embrace roles that are larger than the ones society has determined for them. Within these *liminal spaces* women such as Sojourner Truth and Jarena Lee are able to transcend hierarchies of race, class, and gender, and they, therefore, have “greater possibilities of self-expression as well as the potential to effect great social change” (18). Peterson goes on to assert that *liminal spaces* can also “separate women from their homes and native communities, forcing an unfeminine exposure of the body and thus further reminding them of their difference” (19-20). In contrast, I envision *interstitial spaces* as potentially allowing women to transcend the limitations of race, class, gender, and, thus, their differences. Whereas Peterson argues that women may be able to locate power in *liminal spaces*, I argue that women are powerful because they have the ability to manipulate the physical and metaphorical purposes of spaces, although such manipulations may be temporary. By creating or taking advantage of existing *interstitial spaces*, rather than finding *liminal spaces*, I argue women like Jacobs, Wilson, and Wharton are revising the domestic ideology that can prevent them from having spaces, whether physical or metaphorical, of their own. Each of the writers I focus on relies heavily on *interstitial spaces* to argue that the precise historical and cultural moment they examine often does not account for a

woman's view of space or her need to possess a space of her own. My project is organized thematically and, to some degree, spatially, as I examine interstitial spaces in exterior locations to ones in interior spaces finally to houses as whole. Section 2, which is entitled "'Life waits; and art is long': Nature, Creativity, and Interstitial Spaces in Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Story of Avis*," examines outdoor locations as interstitial spaces, arguing that some women need such spaces in order to be creatively and intellectually fulfilled. In Section 3, "'Like one who feels the stirring of free and independent thoughts': Narrative and Interstitial Spaces in Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," I consider how Jacobs and Wilson's protagonists manipulate interstitial locations, which include physical spaces and their narratives, into sites of resistance, enabling themselves to revise domestic ideology in a way that makes it relevant for African American women of the mid-nineteenth century. Section 4, "'And, besides what was there to go home to?': Identity, Home, and Interstitial Spaces in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*," asserts that not all women are able to negotiate the power they claim in interstitial spaces to their advantage; such women often fall victim to their interstitial environments and their roles within society.

Each section relies upon issues of architectural theory and feminist theory and criticism that are relevant to my study. These theories allow me to examine conceptions of public and private spaces alongside nineteenth-century constructions of race, class, and gender. Additionally, by combining architectural theory and history with feminist theory, I consider how nineteenth-century American women writers engaged with both the theoretical and physical realities of the spaces they encountered on a daily basis. I am most interested in the ways female characters—and female writers—in nineteenth-century American novels and narratives manipulate spatial territory to their advantage (and, in some cases, how they fail to do so).

For example, I argue that Harriet E. Wilson's Frado and Harriet Jacobs's Linda Brent are successful at claiming and empowering themselves in interstitial spaces because their positions as an African American, female indentured servant and as an African American, formerly enslaved woman, respectively, make them very aware of the spatial limitations they face. Thus, because they have virtually no access to any spaces that they can safely claim as their own, they claim and create interstitial spaces, both physical and metaphorical. They see such spaces as key locations that they use to their advantage by transforming them into sites of resistance. The interstitial space by the Bellmonts' woodpile becomes such a site for Frado, while Linda Brent converts the otherwise useless garret space above her grandmother's shed into an interstitial space. In both of these places, Frado and Brent are able to claim ownership over themselves and end the abuse each has endured for years. Their decisions to use interstitial spaces enables them to assert power over themselves, to control their own bodies, and, ultimately, to direct the outcome of their own lives. As a result, they are able to free themselves, first metaphorically and then physically. While Frado and Brent claim physical locations as interstitial spaces, Wilson and Jacobs each conceive of their texts as interstitial spaces; they use their life stories, which both women fictionalize to some extent, to enter a public forum where each can discuss private matters as they lay claim to literal and metaphoric spaces of their own where they can openly express their feelings on slavery and servitude, racism, motherhood, freedom, and home.

In contrast to the successful ways Frado and Brent as well as Wilson and Jacobs make use of interstitial spaces, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's Avis Dobell and Edith Wharton's Lily Bart are less successful at locating long-lasting agency in interstitial spaces because they are unable to negotiate their own desires to have spaces of their own with social convention that dictates they must conform to a specific standard of womanhood. Avis's failure takes the form of leaving the interstitial spaces that do empower her, specifically outdoor spaces and her painting studio, for

the traditionally domestic, feminine spaces of the home once she marries. Avis mistakenly believes she can have an equal marriage, one in which she will not be required to sacrifice her individual dreams and desires in order to care for her husband and her children. By moving to domestic spaces, which she has found to be physically and creatively stifling her entire life, Avis relinquishes ownership of several interstitial spaces that brought her comfort, solace, and creative stimulation, and she effectively denies that she needs a space of her own beyond the home. While Avis seemingly decides to give up her access to spaces of her own, Lily Bart has no space she can call her own. Without such a space, even an interstitial one, Lily is unable to negotiate her interstitial existence and the various interstitial spaces she occupies to her advantage. Instead, she falls victim to her society, to her environment, and to her own inability to see past society's expectations of her in order to construct herself according to her own terms.

Given the examples that I analyze, I offer a fairly focused definition of interstitial spaces. I envision them primarily as physical and metaphorical locations that the women I discuss either create or inhabit in some way. This is not to suggest that interstitial spaces cannot be construed as larger, more imagined spaces or that they occur only in fictional or fictionalized works. At this time, however, I leave it to others to theorize the uses of spaces in other genres or to analyze the broad historical implications of geography and material culture upon nineteenth-century American women's conceptions of spaces. With my analysis of interstitial spaces in the works of these four disparate women, I aim to show that many women working and writing in nineteenth-century America sought to challenge the domestic and architectural rules of the period and attempted to create a new ideology that better addressed the needs and desires of all women.

2. “LIFE WAITS; AND ART IS LONG”: NATURE, CREATIVITY, AND INTERSTITIAL SPACES IN ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS’S *THE STORY OF AVIS*

Where [Avis] stood high upon the wall, her health and youth and color seemed to cut themselves like articulate words before [Philip’s] eyes. He, upon the side of the ascending field, crawled weakly towards her. He was shattered as a broken column. For that moment they looked steadily and silently upon one another.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Story of Avis*

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s 1877 novel *The Story of Avis* tells the story of Avis Dobell, a young, talented woman artist who is torn between her desire to become a successful painter and the unexpected love she feels for Philip Ostrander, a young geology professor. In the passage quoted above, Philip confronts Avis, demanding that she consider his proposal of marriage one final time. Throughout their ensuing conversation, Avis stands atop a stone wall, which acts as a breaker between the beaches and fields of Avis’s hometown of Harmouth, Massachusetts. The stone wall also serves as both a physical and a metaphorical barrier for Avis.

Physically, the wall protects Harmouth’s fields from tidal erosion and separates Avis and Philip during their confrontation. Metaphorically, the wall divides the two halves of Avis: the half that loves art and nature and wants to pursue a career as an painter and the half that loves Philip and is intrigued by the thought of an equal marriage, which Philip has assured her theirs would be. The wall, or rather the act of stepping down from the wall, further signifies choice: just as Avis can choose whether to leave the wall for the beach or the fields, she can also choose the life of an artist or the life of a wife and mother. As Avis stands astride it, the stone wall becomes an interstitial space—a space that is neither wholly public, nor wholly private. Further, the interstitial spaces helps Avis claim the power of choice. Avis can use the interstitial nature of the space to her advantage and forego defining herself as completely one thing or another. On

the stone wall, which is ostensibly a public location, Avis is able to consider the outcome of her life privately. Surveying the vastly different landscapes of Harmouth, Avis can consider the various paths her life could take; further, she is able to consider what her life might be like if she did not feel compelled—and if societal convention did not dictate that she had—to choose between her love for art and her love for a man. Her position enables Avis to contemplate the possibility of both paths without having to commit to either. The in-between, the interstitial nature of the wall empowers Avis because it affords her the space to examine her possible futures and to make the choice that she believes is best for her.

It is clear from her descriptions of both Avis and Philip that Phelps sees the wall and its interstitial qualities as empowering for Avis. On the wall, Avis's "health and youth and color seem to cut themselves like articulate words" (Phelps 99). In the interstitial space of the wall, Avis is not only mentally and emotionally empowered, but she is also physically powerful. Phelps intends the reader to view Avis as a woman in charge of her life, especially in this particular moment. In contrast, Philip, who is still recovering from wounds he received while fighting in the Civil War, "crawled weakly towards" Avis and appears to be physically "shattered" (99). Philip, who has, up until this moment, been cast as Avis's mental and physical equal, is shown at a clear disadvantage; the most he can hope for is that Avis steps down from the wall on the side that he occupies. A new professor at Harmouth College and widely considered the most eligible bachelor in town, Philip is unaccustomed to waiting for a woman for anything, but in this moment, he is at the mercy of both Avis and the interstitial space she occupies.

For Avis, and by extension Phelps, interstitial spaces are locations, whether physical or metaphorical, that defy the distinct classifications that most other spaces are subject to. The fluidity of interstitial spaces mean that they can be adapted or transformed to meet the needs of

the person who claims such spaces as her own. The interstitial nature of the stone wall, for example, enables Avis to claim it as her personal sanctuary, for however long she stands on it. Even though Avis is visible to Philip and anyone else in the general vicinity while she is on the wall, she is also in a private space as she cannot be easily reached by anyone standing on the ground. From her place on the wall, she occupies a position of power, which Phelps emphasizes by placing Avis physically above Philip. And Avis does manipulate the wall to meet her own needs as she can render it public or private by either ignoring or acknowledging Philip. The wall, and other interstitial spaces, offers Avis, and, to some degree, all women, the room to explore, create, and shape the outcome of their lives. Interstitial spaces are empowering to women who occupy them because such spaces make it possible for them to contemplate their lives beyond the boundaries of traditional feminine spaces, which are typically private and located almost exclusively in the home. The interstitial nature of the wall grants Avis the space to do just that.

Standing on the stone wall, Avis is aware that she alone can choose either to remain on the wall or to step down onto the beach side or the field side and into Philip's arms. That Phelps both has Avis occupy such a space and that she gives Avis the power to choose is key. By placing Avis on a wall that essentially divides the two options available to her, Phelps emphasizes the rarity and power of interstitial spaces. In fact, Phelps places Avis in spaces that I define as interstitial throughout the novel, including her studio, the outdoors, and her aunt's gardens. If Avis limited herself to more traditionally feminine spaces, her ability to choose for herself, Phelps suggests, would be severely hampered. Further, Phelps makes her protagonist responsible for the outcome of her own life; whether she chooses a career over a more traditional path, Avis is the one to make that decision.

With *The Story of Avis*, Phelps questions the idea that every woman instinctually desires to be a wife and a mother and can be completely fulfilled solely through these traditional roles. *The Story of Avis* contemplates a woman's desire to have a career rather than a family. Rather than assert that women need to focus exclusively on their traditional roles within the private sphere to preserve the sanctity of the home, Phelps argues that such roles can be profoundly damaging to women who choose them without fully considering the effect they may have on their professional or artistic aspirations. Phelps argues that women who deny they have intellectual and emotional needs that cannot be met solely through domestic roles fail themselves. Women, she asserts, also have a responsibility to fulfill their own needs, and they first must experience the world and learn about themselves in order to determine if they are, in fact, suited to be wives and mothers, roles which, at that time, were all consuming and left them little time for any other personal fulfillment. Phelps further claims that space is integral to women's development and happiness, particularly the physical and metaphorical space to create and that interstitial spaces are particularly useful to women who have creative impulses.¹⁸ In its most basic sense, *The Story of Avis* questions why a woman must give up her dreams and aspirations "on account of her home," her husband, and her family (Wells 819). Phelps insists that many women "can exist without" a connection to the domestic world (819). The novel, with its focus on creative production, also asks why so "many talented women have produced so little" (Kessler Introduction xiii). As critic Carol Farley Kessler claims, Phelps makes clear that it is not a lack of talent but "the absence of emotional support" and the lack of personal space that limits women's ability to produce creative work (xiii).

While Phelps does suggest that interstitial spaces are essential to women who want to develop creatively and intellectually, she does not suggest that women, particularly women like Avis who want a life beyond the traditionally prescribed roles of wife and mother, will be able to

redefine themselves and their worlds simply by locating and claiming interstitial spaces. Phelps does not see space, whether it is a public, private, or interstitial space, as that simple. For Phelps, interstitial spaces are locations in which women can learn to negotiate and to control spaces that are strictly defined as either public or private. Most women, therefore, should consider interstitial spaces as temporary. Women should claim and occupy them as a way to empower themselves, but, eventually they, at least women who seek personal fulfillment beyond the spaces typically designated as feminine, must learn how to wield such power beyond the boundaries of interstitial spaces. Phelps argues that, unfortunately, few women of this period are able to negotiate the move from interstitial spaces to other types of spaces, like the public art world or the privacy of the home, and keep the sense of power they developed in interstitial spaces intact. Avis, for example, is able to take the power she develops in the outdoors and use it to gain control of her own home, but she is not able to translate that power to the world of art auctions and galleries. Phelps recognizes Avis's inability to negotiate the move out of interstitial spaces into more public ones and suggests that Avis would have had a more successful career and, perhaps, a more successful personal life if she had limited herself to interstitial spaces, specifically ones that enable her to focus on her creative ambitions and to limit the time she must spend in domestic spaces.

Phelps, then, envisions interstitial spaces differently from several of the other authors I consider. She sees them as both empowering and limiting. Like Edith Wharton, but unlike Harriet Wilson or Harriet Jacobs,¹⁹ Phelps believes that her protagonist can only develop fully as an individual so long as she occupies interstitial spaces. Once she tries to wield her power beyond interstitial spaces, she falls back into traditional women's roles. While she is able to eventually claim power as a wife and a mother, Avis cannot use that power to fulfill her creative ambitions.

The Story of Avis, widely considered Phelps's best novel, argues that marriage, although sacred, is "seriously flawed" and that it offers remarkably "little refuge to any man or woman" (Kessler Introduction xv). Through *Avis*, Phelps contends that women's "individual growth is stifled by marriage" and that marriage keeps women from experiencing "creative self-expression" (xv). Given the view of marriage that Phelps presents in the novel, it is understandable that most critical discussions of *The Story of Avis*, including those by Kessler, Anne Boyd, Deborah Barker, and Christine Stansell, overlook the novel's focus on space, focusing almost exclusively on Phelps's critique of marriage. These same critics also offer a reading of the novel as a blending of a sentimental novel, a bildungsroman, and a künstlerroman²⁰ or compare the novel to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* or George Eliot's dramatic poem "Armgarth."²¹ Further, Kessler, Boyd, and Ronna Privett Coffey each note that Phelps draws heavily on her own biography to create *Avis* and each discusses *Avis*'s preoccupation with the nature. No critic, however, discusses any of the novel's physical or architectural spaces in any depth, Phelps's analysis of domestic or interior spaces, or the role the natural world plays in the novel. By overlooking the importance of space in the novel—particularly interior spaces versus outdoor locations—the way *Avis* changes according to the type of space she occupies is also overlooked. In this section, I contend that understanding the role of space and the interplay between the natural world and the interior of the home is key to understanding *Avis*'s development as a character. I begin first by briefly outlining the context in which Phelps wrote *The Story of Avis*, then examine nineteenth-century domestic ideology concerning both natural and interior spaces, and finally discuss these spaces and the affects they have upon *Avis*. As I detail throughout the section, *Avis* feels physically and mentally confined in domestic, interior spaces, while she feels empowered and in control of her life in spaces that I define as interstitial, primarily her studio and various outdoor locations. In the course of the

novel, Avis struggles to come to terms with the limited access she has to interstitial spaces and to adapt to the feminine spaces she finds herself occupying more and more.

The novel tells the story of Avis Dobell, a talented young painter who has no desire to marry, to be a mother, or to manage her own home. In fact, Avis firmly believes she is not suited for domesticity, something she realized at twelve years of age when she declared to her father “I hate, hate, to sew . . . and I hate, hate, *hate*, to go cooking round the kitchen” (Avis 25).

²² Avis recognizes that these are tasks that must be performed and that women are typically responsible for them. She does not, however, understand why a woman, such as herself, who has no desire or even aptitude for domestic tasks, should be expected to perform them. Avis simply wants to pursue a career as a painter and leave all domestic responsibilities to her Aunt Chloe, who genuinely seems to enjoy such duties, or to hire servants to manage the home, as her own mother did (27).²³ Avis does not suggest that her father or, indeed, any other man take over household jobs; rather, she questions why she, who would rather be painting or sketching, should be expected to perform such tasks when there are others who are better suited to them.

Because she realizes she is poorly suited to the lifestyle of a wife and mother, Avis decides at a young age that she will not marry. While she does believe that the responsibilities associated with being a wife and a mother would interfere with her ability to be a successful and productive painter, she also realizes that she has no talent for running a home. Avis knows that “Marriage . . . is a profession to a woman,” and she aspires to a different profession (70). Eventually, however, Avis does meet and fall in love with Philip, whom, she eventually marries against her better judgment. As a wife and then a mother, Avis must privilege her husband’s and children’s needs above her own. She no longer has the freedom to lock herself in her studio and paint all day or to roam the countryside looking for inspiration in nature. Instead, she must

spend her days in the feminine spaces of her home attending to the needs of her husband and her children.

Mid-nineteenth-century domestic ideology designated the home as a feminine space. As critic Barbara Welter was among the first to contend, the home, specifically the kitchen, the sitting room, and the parlor, were physical locations over which women maintained relative control. Welter identified these rooms as spaces where women could spread the virtues of purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity; in these spaces, women were “promised power and happiness” (44).²⁴ Lori Merish extends Welter’s argument, asserting that women themselves, who were primarily responsible for organizing and decorating the home, chose which interior spaces were within their domain. The kitchen, the sitting room, and the parlor were the architectural locations that women claimed as their own, and the presence of certain material objects such as conduct books, artwork, antiques, and tableware marked these spaces as feminine. These were the spaces where women could openly express their political views to their husbands, could impart their values to their children, and could even rage against injustice (94). Milette Shamir notes that the interior of the home also included masculine spaces as well. By the mid-nineteenth century, most architects, including prominent architect Andrew Jackson Downing,²⁵ included a study, “an enclave for the solitary mental pursuits of the house’s owner,” in the plans for the average middle-class home (5). Despite the reality that “a strict demarcation between public and private spheres” never really existed (Kelly xii), the nineteenth-century home, specifically those of the Ante- and Postbellum periods, was divided along gender lines, which reflected a distinct change in architectural practices of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. As I have previously stated,²⁶ these changes resulted in houses being more strictly divided into public and private, masculine and feminine spaces. Thus, American society may not have been so strictly divided along these lines, but most American homes were. These were

divisions that many women and domestic reformers considered valuable and sought to maintain. In fact, one of the most famous domestic ideologues, Catharine Beecher,²⁷ argued that women should want to maintain their control of key interior spaces of the home and that such control actually empowered them.

Despite her belief that women actively participated in all aspects of American life through their domestic roles, Beecher did find the amount of time women actually spent in their homes unhealthy and prevented them from being able to run their homes effectively. She called for women to spend less time confined indoors and more time outdoors exercising. During the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American women, young and old, were not encouraged to spend much time outdoors. Ladies were expected to have “rosy cheeks, a finely-moulded form,” and a delicate, fair complexion, which could only be maintained if they protected themselves from the elements (*Treatise* 33). As Lora Romero posits, Beecher “expresses concern that young girls spend too much time indoors in overheated rooms and that when they are permitted outdoors are instructed not ‘to romp and run like boys’” (23). Beecher believed that too much time indoors and too little physical exercise combined with too little time in the fresh air accounted for the fragile constitutions of so many American women (*Treatise* 23). Further, corsets and other forms of dress limited “the natural growth and development of the [female] body” (Romero 23). In comparison to their English counterparts, who are “able to walk six and eight miles on a stretch, without oppressive fatigue,” American women spend their days in tightly tied corsets and heavy dresses in cramped and poorly ventilated interiors (*Treatise* 22). English women, even those of the wealthier classes, are then healthier and better prepared for the physical demands of running a home than American women. While Beecher emphasizes that being outdoors will improve women’s health, she does not consider the positive effect being in nature could have upon women’s intellectual and creative lives. Although Beecher suggests

many ways women can improve their lives, her ultimate purpose is always to help women determine how to run their homes more efficiently, how to improve their health, and how to be happiest within the private sphere. She is largely unconcerned with women's individual needs or desires. Phelps, by contrast, sees exposure to the natural world as necessary for a woman's personal growth and development. Through nature, Phelps believes women can learn to know themselves better.

Although Phelps does conceive of nature as a specific type of space, she does not envision it as necessarily public or private, contrary to common nineteenth-century perceptions (Montgomery 34). As spaces in the home were designated public or private, so too were outdoor spaces. Parks, town squares, and municipal gardens were public spaces, and as such these spaces were governed by strict social codes (Montgomery 34). For example, women could not venture into public parks alone for fear of compromising their reputations. Gardens,²⁸ on the other hand, were typically considered private spaces, and women were, therefore, able to access their own gardens freely. In *The Story of Avis*, the natural world figures prominently, but neither Phelps nor her heroine Avis considers nature in terms of the public-private dichotomy. While Avis is aware that certain natural spaces such as the beach or the fields surrounding Harmouth, render her more visible and, thus, more accessible to people, and spaces like Chloe's extensive gardens or her father's small orchard grant her more privacy, Avis does not always stop to contemplate how visible she wants to be when she is in a specific outdoor space. She simply seeks out these spaces because of her love for nature. Through Avis, Phelps argues that women, at least women in a position similar to Avis's, claim some power by not following the strict designations of public spaces. By not following these designations, Avis actually converts overtly public spaces, particularly Harmouth's beaches and fields, into interstitial spaces by

using them as private spaces in which she can contemplate her future without fear of interruption.

In her introduction to *The Story of Avis*, Kessler describes Avis's connection to the natural world as "sensuous and sensual" and argues that her relationship with the landscape of Harmouth demonstrates her own "sexual passion" (xxiii). Avis's connection to nature, however, goes beyond sexuality and sensuality; it also represents safety and comfort. Avis is most comfortable and most at ease outdoors. As a child, Avis is often found outside picking flowers or climbing trees when she is meant to be working on her sewing or learning to cook. When she is inside, Avis prefers to be in her father's study where she can examine the paintings that adorn the walls or in "the broad cushioned window-sill" of the parlor where she can read or observe her aunt's garden rather than be near the kitchen (*Avis* 27). As a young adult, Avis continues to prefer the outdoors to the interior spaces of the home, and when she is not painting or sketching, she is most often seen wandering along the beach or sitting in her favorite tree. Indeed, Avis is most in control of her mind, her emotions, and her life when she is outdoors.

In natural settings, Avis is unafraid to voice her thoughts and her feelings or to express her hopes for the future. When she is outdoors, beyond the confines of interior, feminine spaces, Avis is also able to declare her extreme dislike and even contempt for the domestic role she knows she is expected to fulfill. For example, Avis is able to articulate quite forcefully her disdain for marriage to Philip when he questions her during a walk in the fields near her father's home (*Avis* 101), but when, in his own study, her father questions her desire to become an artist, Avis is largely unable to respond (33). For Avis, outdoor spaces are both public and private, and as such, she—as well as Phelps—views them as interstitial spaces. While she is outdoors, Avis is often in spaces that are public, yet she is able to be alone with her private thoughts away from the intrusions of Aunt Chloe and her father. Rowing in the ocean, sitting in an apple tree, or

walking on the beach, Avis can escape both familial and social expectations that she sublimate her ambitions to be a painter in favor of becoming a wife and a mother, even though she does not feel compelled to act upon these ambitions just yet. Interstitial locations, such as the beach or her father's orchard, grant Avis the room in which to consider her future without having to respond to society's public pressures or her family's private ones.

Phelps seems to further envision the natural world as an alternative to domesticity. By aligning Avis so closely with nature, Phelps relies upon "the nineteenth-century association of good women with nature and nature's God" (Harris 202). But, as critic Susan K. Harris suggests, Phelps uses Avis's love for the natural world "to suggest that God may have intended good women for purposes other than domesticity" (203). By choosing a career that "reject[s] the primacy of domesticity," Avis is able to create a new space for herself, one that is neither fully private nor public, but something in between, something that she cannot name and is, perhaps, not even fully aware of (203). Thus, the natural world becomes an interstitial space for Avis, as it allows her to be separate from the domestic sphere but does not require her to be fully integrated into the public world. Removed from both the confining interiors of the home and the glare of the public world, Avis is able to name her own desires and choose a career that will take her far from the domestic world. Outdoors, she is able to avoid the expectations of her art teachers and her family; because she is removed from the strictures of her teachers' studios, she can work on her art without fearing their criticism and that of art critics; and she can also avoid her domestic duties without suffering the reprisals of her aunt or her father. Nature, thus, is a source of strength for Avis. Free from the rules that govern both the private and the public spheres, the natural world becomes a space in which Avis can determine what is best for her, without considering the needs of her family, her mentors, or the man who claims to love her.

With Avis, Phelps suggests that women, especially women with creative aspirations, must maintain connections with nature in order to know themselves and to develop their creativity.

Indoors Avis changes. Once inside, especially in traditionally feminine spaces, Avis ceases to be the outspoken, creative individual she is when outside, and she becomes a “housed, sheltered, hearth-loving creature,” who is largely unable to stand by her convictions or listen to her instincts (*Avis* 48). In fact, Avis even seems to change physically indoors, transforming into a quiet, compliant woman who pours tea with a “native daintiness” and sits obediently at her father’s feet to read the evening prayer (48, 49). Indoors, Avis finds she must conform, and she is continually feels stifled by her father and her aunt’s domestic demands. Simply put, the home is not a place of refuge for Avis. Unlike her Aunt Chloe or her friend Coy, Avis does not view the home as a space of power for women. She does not relish being in control of the kitchen, the parlor, and the drawing room as Coy does, nor does she believe that she is fulfilling her feminine and God-sanctioned duty by cooking, cleaning, and sewing as her aunt does. Rather, she views the home as a space in which she is expected to perform duties that she finds distasteful and tedious and which consume energy she would rather devote to her art. Additionally, Avis not only hates to keep house, she has no aptitude for it. She cannot sew a straight seam and her bread is sour. Avis feels physically restrained inside, particularly in the rooms of the home that are associated with domestic work. The only interior space which affords Avis any solace is her studio, which is located in her aunt’s extensive gardens in a building that is architecturally separate from her father’s home.

Like the natural world, her studio becomes an interstitial space, as it is a space where neither the public nor the private spheres can intrude; in fact, Avis views her studio as an extension of her aunt’s gardens; the studio is simply an outdoor space in which she is protected from the elements. There, Avis has both the time and the space to paint. She can give herself up

to her creativity and completely forget about her domestic responsibilities. Outdoors and in her studio, Avis is free from domesticity, she can define herself according to her own desires, and she can choose her own path regardless of the pressures others place on her. When she is outside, Avis is able to voice and claim her own aspirations; surrounded by the natural world she can sublimate her desires for love and marriage because she knows that in order to marry she will have to sacrifice not only her career but herself. When she occupies more traditional interior spaces, like her aunt's kitchen or the sitting room, however, Avis loses her resolve and makes choices that go against her better judgment. Removed from the interstitial spaces that she finds comforting, Avis is overwhelmed by the conventions of the private sphere, and she is unable to maintain her resolve that marriage is not for her. In fact, every scene in which Avis acquiesces to those who demand she fulfill a more traditional role takes place indoors; similarly, the scenes in which Avis is able to voice her own desires and to demand she has the space to make those desires a reality occurs outdoors. Through Avis, Phelps argues that physical spaces are as responsible for limiting women as familial expectations and social convention. Without access to interstitial spaces that they can control and manipulate to meet their needs, women like Avis cannot escape the pressures of domestic life and must sacrifice their own dreams to fulfill their responsibilities to their families.

Both Phelps and her protagonist Avis regard domestic work similarly, as both express no desire to fulfill domestic roles. Even as a child, Avis had neither much interest in nor talent for the domestic arts. Her mother, who died when Avis was a child, cultivated in her an appreciation for art, literature, and nature, all things that she herself loved. Indeed, Avis's mother was as unconventional as Avis. At nineteen, she married Professor Dobell, who was then 35 and an established professor at Harmouth College. Avis's mother appeared to be "demure enough" to be a professor's wife (*Avis* 20). It is widely known, however, that the Professor

secured her hand in marriage “just in time to prevent her from running away to go upon the stage” (20). This description suggests that Mrs. Dobell was a woman, who like her own daughter, did not necessarily want to forsake her own dreams to assume the responsibilities associated with being a wife and mother.

Many critics, Anne E. Boyd, Lori Duin Kelley, and Carol Farley Kessler among them, have noted that Phelps drew heavily on her mother’s biography when creating Avis’s mother. Phelps’s mother, who was also named Elizabeth Stuart Phelps,²⁹ was “a popular author of Sunday school tales and novels,” most of which she penned and published after she married and became a mother (Boyd 45). As the younger Phelps notes, “Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was well past thirty before either the home or the world found out she was destined to be anything other than [a] homekeeper” (AP 87). Married to Austin Phelps, a minister and professor at Andover Theological Seminary, the elder Phelps wrote both out of an intellectual desire and a need to supplement her husband’s income.³⁰ As Boyd argues, she “was representative of the antebellum writer who understood her talents as secondary to her familial duties and as only to be used in the service of God” (47).³¹ Phelps could only write if she did so with her husband’s approval, which she had, and if doing so did not interfere with her ability to mother her three children.

By all accounts, both critical and personal, the elder Phelps was able to combine a career and motherhood. Her success as a writer, it seems, mirrored her success as a mother. Her first novel *The Sunnyside; or, A Country Minister’s Wife* was published in 1851 and sold 100,000 copies in its first year on the market; according to Boyd, its popularity was only surpassed by Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which was released the following year (45). Phelps published two more books in 1852, and both sold well. Her daughter, who seems to have idolized her, believed that Phelps’s astonishing success “came at a steep price,” however (45). The younger Phelps believed of her mother that

Genius was in her, and would out. She wrote because she could not help it, and her public read because it could not help it, and asked for more and got it. A wife, a mother, a housekeeper, a hostess, in delicate health, on an academic salary, undertakes a deadly load when she starts upon a literary career. She lifted it to her frail shoulders, and she fell beneath it. (*AP* 87)

Phelps further notes in her autobiography “[my mother’s] last book and last baby came together, and killed her” (*CL* 12). She describes her mother as a “maid-of-all-work,” unable to forsake either her domestic responsibilities or her writing (*AP* 88). She was “too good a housekeeper to be ‘easy’ in her environment. She was too conscientious a mother to let her children ‘go’ . . . And, alas, she was too successful a writer not to write” (89). Elizabeth Stuart Phelps would forever “attribute her mother’s death to the demands of maintaining both a family and a literary career, a mistake she did not want to make” (Boyd 45). Indeed, Phelps seems to have considered her mother’s choices at every stage of her life. While she follows the career path her mother set out for her, she made vastly different choices in her personal life, deciding not to have children and only to marry after she became a commercial and critical success as a writer.

Unlike Phelps’s mother, Mrs. Dobell gave up her own dreams to become an actress once she decided to marry, believing, it seems, that she could not combine a successful acting career with marriage and motherhood. That Phelps never gives Mrs. Dobell a first name and has her to want be an actress are both significant. By not naming her, Phelps must refer to her by her relationships to the other characters in the novel; she is “the little bride,” “the professor’s wife,” “Mrs. Dobell,” and “[Avis’s] pretty mother” (*Avis* 21, 23, 24). Thus, Mrs. Dobell never has an identity of her own; she is just the professor’s wife or Avis’s mother.

Moreover, while writing can be considered a private art, acting is a public one. A woman can write in whatever time she can claim for herself throughout the day and after she has

put her children to bed, but an actress must forsake time in the home with her children to rehearse and perform. Further, in nineteenth-century America, acting was still viewed as a profession that was potentially damaging to a woman's reputation (Carrión 111). Under certain circumstances, respectable women could write, but they could not act. In order to marry, Mrs. Dobell must forsake her gift for the stage and devote herself to her husband, her home, and her daughter. Her sacrifice, as Professor Dobell explains to an adult Avis the one and only time she openly questions her mother's decision to have a family rather than a career, was genuine: "My wife was not like most women, given to magnifying every little aesthetic taste into an unappreciated genius. She had, beyond doubt, the histrionic gift. Under proper conditions she might have become famous" (*Avis* 25). Avis, who seems to be trying to understand the effect giving up her art had on her mother, wonders if "in all those years, shut up in this quiet house, she ever knew a restless longing in that—in those—in such directions?" (25). While Professor Dobell willingly recognizes his wife's talent, he refuses to consider that she may have regretted giving up the stage or any part of their life together, telling Avis that the love they shared more than made up for whatever his wife sacrificed.

By casting Mrs. Dobell as a would-be actress Phelps also emphasizes the idea that not all women dreamt of being wives and mothers.³² In fact, Phelps describes Mrs. Dobell in terms that seem antithetical to a life focused on the domestic sphere: she is a "restless, glittering, inefficient thing, like a humming-bird turned radical" (*Avis* 21). Every description of Mrs. Dobell highlights her beauty and inability to sit still, which suggests that she, like her daughter, is more at home outdoors than indoors. No one, including her husband, remembers her as a willing, an enthusiastic, or even a good housekeeper. She is, however, a devoted wife and mother, in spite of her unexpressed desire for a more artistic life: "If the professor's little wife were a humming-bird, she was a very tender and true one: she loved the great hand that had lured her from the

fields on which the wild dew lay, and sipped his grave domestic honey with happy upturned look” (21). As the quotation suggests, her discomfort in the domestic sphere, which she passes on to Avis, does not interfere with her ability or her desire to fulfill her emotional duties as a wife and mother. Mrs. Dobell, then, also occupies an interstitial space: she is a willing wife and mother, but she is an unwilling homemaker as she does not embrace her domestic responsibilities as other women in the novel do. Further, Mrs. Dobell does not see either interior or exterior spaces as clearly gendered. As a would-be actress, she likely has spent some time beyond the private sphere; she knows what it is like to make her own decisions, to live on her own, and to be independent. Although she chose to marry and become a mother, Mrs. Dobell did so only after considering another, less conventional type of life. Her experiences in the public sphere seem to have had an affect on her parenting style. She does not attempt to keep Avis indoors or to limit her to the feminine spaces of the home. In fact, she makes little attempt to prepare Avis for a life of domesticity at all.³³ Rather than teaching her to cook in the kitchen or to sew in the sitting room, Mrs. Dobell encourages Avis’s interests in art and nature and allows her to explore her father’s study and the fields and beaches of Harmouth. Despite having ultimately chosen a traditional path for herself, Mrs. Dobell is not a traditional mother; she consciously seems to foster confidence, independence, and creativity in Avis as she teaches her that she need not adhere to the social or spatial boundaries enforced upon women.

Perhaps the best example of Mrs. Dobell fostering Avis’s independence is her refusal to answer directly Avis’s questions about either her own past or Avis’s future. When, at age eight, Avis asks her mother “What shall I be?” Mrs. Dobell answers her young daughter with a question: “What shall you *be*, Avis?” (23). That Mrs. Dobell emphasizes “be” rather than “shall” is significant. Placing the emphasis on “shall” would suggest that Mrs. Dobell, much like Avis and her friends, is thinking of the future, but instead, Mrs. Dobell stresses “be,” which

tacitly suggests that she believes that her daughter will, in fact, “be” something more than what is expected of most young women. When Avis details her friends’ choices—Coy will be a lady, Barbara a wife, and Drayton, the only male friend mentioned, will keep dogs (23)—her mother simply listens without commenting. Avis then declares “I think I’d rather keep dogs,” implying that she finds Coy and Barbara’s choices unsatisfactory. When her mother still does not respond, Avis asks her mother if she had, indeed, run away to be an actress as Coy and Barbara had told her: “Mamma, did you run away?” (24). Again, rather than answering her, Mrs. Dobell continues to listen as Avis reveals that her friends have told her about her mother’s theatric aspirations. Mrs. Dobell offers an explanation for her own choices only after Avis asks “if you wanted to keep theaters, why didn’t you?” (24). To Avis, the question is simple, and therefore, her mother, although so agitated by the conversation that she must set her sewing aside, responds simply: “‘Avis,’ she said gravely, ‘I married your papa: that is why I never acted in the theater’” (24). Avis accepts this answer and moves on to another subject, prattling off another series of questions. Only a child, she does not recognize her mother’s grave response, her refusal to answer Avis directly, or her reticence to discuss her past. Here Mrs. Dobell implicitly admits that she could have chosen a very different life for herself, one that may have left her more intellectually satisfied, and tells Avis that she need not make the same choices she did. By not sharing details of her own past, Mrs. Dobell conveys to Avis that she alone chose her life and that she is happy to be Avis’s mother. Her grave countenance and evident agitation, however, reveal this is a painful subject for her because she had to give up a life she loved to be with the person she loved. That she found it impossible to combine home and career and that she gave up her own desires to marry the man she loved does not mean that Avis will. Further, throughout this scene, Mrs. Dobell does not direct Avis at all; instead, she gives Avis the space to formulate answers to her own questions. In so doing she silently teaches her daughter that she can choose

her own life. Avis does not have to become a lady or a wife; she can, in fact, forego these conventional paths and “keep dogs,” if she chooses (24). Through her decision to withhold information about her own past, to refrain from imposing her own dreams on her daughter, and to grant her daughter the intellectual space to ask such questions, Mrs. Dobell mothers Avis from a discreet distance, ensuring that Avis is not overly influenced by her choices. Mrs. Dobell wants Avis to understand that her life is her own and she need not make her choices based on familial expectations or social convention. Mrs. Dobell is a constant presence in Avis’s life and offers her physical, emotional, and intellectual support, but she gives Avis the space to realize that her life does not have to follow a pre-set pattern. By listening to Avis’s questions but allowing her to develop her own answers, Mrs. Dobell reassures Avis that she can make her own way in life.

That this conversation takes place indoors, presumably in Mrs. Dobell’s sitting room or her kitchen,³⁴ adds to its significance. By having this conversation in a space that is typically designated as feminine, specifically a space that most nineteenth-century women viewed as empowering, Mrs. Dobell tells Avis that she need not limit herself to these spaces. By instilling in Avis the power to choose her own life, her mother also tells her that she does not have to find these spaces empowering or even comforting. Avis can, in fact, eschew feminine, interior spaces in favor of the outdoor spaces she clearly prefers, even as a child. Avis’s feeling completely out of place in spaces that nineteenth-century domestic ideology defined as feminine render her unable to express her own desires effectively as she struggles to find her voice in such spaces. Mrs. Dobell’s unspoken message to Avis that she can choose her own path, that she need not fulfill a role dictated to her solely by social custom is made more meaningful because she imparts this message to Avis in a feminine space. She is, on some level, telling Avis that she does not have to live out her life in feminine spaces. Further, although Mrs. Dobell, by sewing,

is tending to her domestic responsibilities, Avis is just “sitting in the sunlight” (23). This conversation occurs during a private moment between mother and daughter, not one in which Mrs. Dobell is trying to teach Avis about the domestic arts. Indeed, Phelps makes it clear in later chapters that Mrs. Dobell taught her daughter surprisingly little about cooking, cleaning, or sewing. Instead, she has encouraged Avis to read, to explore nature, and to become her own person. All of these subtle messages from her mother strengthen Avis’s belief that she is not meant for a life in the home.

Shortly after this conversation, Mrs. Dobell becomes ill and dies. As Kessler contends, “Avis’ mother had wasted away because of the inadequate stimulation of domestic cares” (“Literary Legacy” 31). Although Phelps does not specifically blame intellectual and creative boredom for Mrs. Dobell’s death, Phelps does make it clear that Mrs. Dobell “had no disease; only the waxing and waning and wasting of a fine, feverish excitement, for which there seemed to be neither cause nor remedy” (*Avis* 25). As with her mother’s past, her mother’s illness and subsequent death are never fully explained to Avis.³⁵ Years later she recalls being told that her mother’s health was improving only to be awakened in “hot haste” to visit her mother at the moment of her death (25). At her mother’s request, Avis lies beside her and tries to cheer her up by showing her a picture she drew in the night: “It is a picture of a bird, mamma, with trees. I thought you’d like to see it. And—O mamma! the wing!—see the wing the sun has made upon the sky! It looks as if it meant to wrap us, wrap us, wrap us in” (26). Having seen her daughter’s drawing and heard her describe being wrapped in a bird’s wing, Mrs. Dobell utters “a tense and awestruck cry” and dies (26).

That Avis is left motherless at such a young age is critical for several reasons. First, and most importantly for the purposes of my argument, Mrs. Dobell would have understood and even encouraged her daughter’s artistic aspirations as well as Avis’s dislike for domestic work and

feminine spaces. It seems likely that Mrs. Dobell would have advocated for Avis—arguing that she be allowed to study art abroad, that she have a space for her studio, and that her domestic duties be limited so that she could focus on her art. As Mrs. Dobell’s willingness to encourage Avis’s interests in art and other non-domestic activities suggests, she would have supported whatever path Avis chose, whether she decided to become a doctor or a wife and mother. In her mother’s absence, Avis must be her own advocate and explain her dream of becoming an artist to her father on her own. She must voice her own dreams and find ways to make them a reality. Her mother’s absence is detrimental because without her, Avis must argue her case herself. She must convince her father that her love of art is not just a passing fancy, that she should be allowed to go to Europe to study, and that she needs a studio space where she can work uninterrupted. While all of these things strengthen Avis’s resolve and make her even more determined to become an artist, they also take time away from her work—time that she could spend developing her talent.

With her mother’s death, Avis’s childhood of romping through fields and asking endless questions comes to an abrupt end. Further, without her mother to argue that drawing and painting are more important than any domestic chores she may have, Avis can no longer avoid the domestic work that she so despises. At this point in the novel, Phelps’s introduces Avis’s Aunt Chloe, who, to some degree, is the antithesis of Mrs. Dobell. As much as her mother believed Avis could eschew traditionally feminine roles and spaces if she desired, Chloe believes that Avis must learn to be what she considers a proper woman.

Following his wife’s death, Professor Dobell writes to his sister, “beseeching her to bring the presence of the ‘ever-womanly’ into the desolated house of a broken-hearted man” (*Avis* 26). He does not ask his sister to care for Avis, merely to bring a womanly presence back into his house. Phelps’s wording has Professor Dobell put his own need to have his house run

smoothly and not be bothered by domestic dramas before his daughter's need for a mother. For her part Aunt Chloe immediately considers Avis; she wonders what "would be her clear duty to do by that child" (26). But Chloe's primary concern is not for Avis's emotional well-being; she is most worried about Avis's diet, observing that "her poor mother had never attended to her diet" (26). Whereas Mrs. Dobell was more concerned with Avis's emotional and intellectual well-being, Chloe is more concerned with practical matters—she wants to ensure Avis is well-fed and all of her physical needs are met, but she is uncertain how to nurture a child who is so different from herself. From the moment Chloe arrives, having told her brother she would "do the best she could" (26), Avis must find emotional, creative, and intellectual stimulation on her own. She not only lacks a mother, but she lacks someone who understands her yearning for a life beyond the confines of the home.

On the surface, Chloe appears to be the complete opposite of Avis's mother. "[A] homeless widow, of excellent Vermont intentions," Chloe is an infinitely practical woman (*Avis* 26). Unlike Mrs. Dobell, Chloe believes it is a woman's responsibility to solve the daily problems associated with running a home. Rather than let servants oversee the domestic tasks, Chloe prefers to oversee the servants, and she even works right along side them. Phelps's portrayal of Chloe is strikingly similar to Harriet Beecher Stowe's Miss Ophelia of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published some twenty-five years before *The Story of Avis*. Miss Ophelia is

a person who is in the habit of making up her mind definitely on all subjects; while the keen, dark eyes had a peculiarly searching, advised movement, and traveled over everything, as if they were looking for something [or someone] to take care of . . . In her habits, she was a living impersonation of order, method, and exactness. In punctuality, she was as inevitable as a clock, and as

inexorable as a railroad engine; and she held in most decided contempt and abomination anything of a contrary character. (Stowe 137)

Although Phelps never offers such a lengthy description of Chloe, this passage could just as easily refer to her. Like Stowe's Ophelia, Chloe has a strong, almost inherent sense of duty and her place in the world. She believes that, as a woman, her life must be lived in the domestic world; she was first a devoted daughter and sister, then a devoted wife, and now she is a devoted aunt to her motherless niece. Chloe embraces her domestic responsibilities not out of personal choice, but out of a belief that it is her feminine obligation to do so. Further, Chloe never questions the gendered spatial divisions of the home or the world at large. Thus, Phelps represents Chloe as having no need for interstitial spaces. She is content in feminine spaces, and she is only seen in masculine spaces, such as Professor Dobell's study, when she needs to discuss Avis with him. That Chloe believes there was no other life for her to choose or role for her to play is key. Phelps suggests that had Chloe been encouraged to question the strict divisions between public and private, between male and female roles, and had she been told that her interests were as valuable as any man's she may well have chosen another life for herself.

That Chloe has not been taught to question her role is best represented in her love of flowers and her belief that she could not turn this love into a career. As Avis loves nature and art, her aunt loves flowers. In fact, "In the course of a severe and simple life [Chloe] had known one passion, and one only,—the refined passion for flowers" (*Avis* 26). Chloe's love of flowers and gardening is so deep that when she agrees to manage her brother's household "Her sole stipulation was, that she might be allowed to bring her geraniums" (26). In fact, Chloe loves her flowers and gardening as much as Avis loves to paint. The key difference between their two passions, however, is that Chloe believes her love of flowers can be nothing more than a hobby and Avis wants to make her love of painting a career. Chloe then privileges the needs of others

over her own desires, reconciling herself to gardening only when she has free time. Whereas Avis actively seeks to shed the role she is expected to fill, Chloe simply cannot see past the traditional feminine role of caretaker. She has not been taught to go against social or familial convention as Avis has. And yet, Chloe reveals her long unspoken desire for a career of her own when Avis, on the verge of marriage, asks her “did *you* never in all your life want to be anything else but my uncle’s wife? Is there nothing in all the world that you,—a woman of overflowing energy and individuality, and organizing power . . . is there nothing that you ever wanted to *be*?” (114).³⁶ Whereas Mrs. Dobell responded to similar questions indirectly, Chloe, keeping with her practical and straightforward nature, responds succinctly and briefly, telling Avis in a subdued tone

I suppose all of us have times of thinking strange thoughts and wishing impossible things. I have thought sometimes—if I could begin life over, and choose for my own selfish pleasure, that I would like to give myself to the culture and study of plants. I should be—a florist, perhaps my dear; or a botanist. (114)

As critic Ronna Privett Coffey points out, “Chloe had wanted to work in the public sphere . . . rather than assume her domestic role [as] pruner and cultivator” (173). But Chloe feels that even sharing these long unspoken desires is tantamount to uttering “some heresy” (115). She immediately feels guilty for telling Avis about this long suppressed desire—and even for having it, as evidenced by the way she returns to “her knitting with a fierce repentance” (*Avis* 115). In Chloe’s mind, duty overshadows desire, especially for women. Chloe, like Miss Ophelia, is a steadfast New England woman who has been taught from birth that her needs and wants are less important than any man’s or her family’s. As Ophelia willingly leaves behinds her natal family, her friends, and her home at her cousin’s request because it is her duty to do so, Aunt Chloe

similarly sublimates her own ambitions first to marry and then to run her brother's home and to raise his daughter. While it is perfectly acceptable for her brother to spend his days fulfilling his dream of becoming a professor, Chloe, and, in her mind, all other women, must focus on more practical matters, such as attending to her family's digestion. But, in spite of her determination that Avis will be prepared to fulfill a woman's traditional responsibilities, Chloe is not an example of a "completely subjugated woman." Like Mrs. Dobell, she is

an example of the sacrifices women make in order to conform to society's requirements for women. Chloe embodies the social standard which attempts to mold each woman into the same limited shape; she is the cultivated garden . . . where the ideal woman can funnel her desires for self-fulfillment toward more socially acceptable and domestic capacities. (Coffey 174)

Despite her admission that she did, at one time, long for a different sort of life, Chloe clearly represents the domestic realm, and she is determined to make-up for what she sees as Mrs. Dobell's inadequacies as a homemaker. In contrast to the cultivated garden that Chloe represents, Avis represents wild, untamed nature, and as such, she struggles to adapt to the feminine spaces that Chloe expects her to conform to.

From the moment that she arrives in her brother's home, Chloe makes it known that she believes his wife did not manage her home very effectively nor help her daughter understand her domestic duties. Chloe then makes it her mission to make up for Mrs. Dobell's deficiencies, believing that if "Avis failed . . . to grow up like other girls . . . it would be owing chiefly to her poor mother's city-bred, unthrifty system of allowing servants to manage their work with so little personal supervision" (*Avis* 29). As Chloe begins teaching Avis how to cook, clean, and sew, she unconsciously inscribes gendered demarcations upon the Dobell home. Although Chloe continues to allow Avis ample time outdoors, she severely limits the time Avis is permitted to

spend in her father's study, a space she was previously free to explore at will. The bulk of Avis's time is now spent in the kitchen learning to make bread and in the sitting room learning to cut dress patterns.

The spatial changes that Chloe enforces help Avis begin to realize that she must transform the spaces she is permitted to occupy to fit her individual needs. Thus, Chloe unconsciously reiterates what Mrs. Dobell tried to impart to Avis before she died: Avis must choose which spaces she finds most fulfilling. For Avis, as for so many other women seeking creative and intellectual outlets, those spaces are not the tame, controlled, interior spaces of the kitchen and the living room. Rather they are the freer, less controlled spaces that women are not meant to occupy: the outdoors and her father's study, both of which are defined typically as masculine spaces. To gain unfettered access to these spaces, Avis must convert them into interstitial spaces, making them neither completely masculine nor feminine, neither entirely public nor private. By transforming them into interstitial spaces, Phelps casts such locations as border spaces; as such her protagonist is able to disregard the limits of masculine and feminine, public and private to claim spaces that enable her to become the person she wants to be, not the person her family and society believe she should be.

In spite of her dislike of domestic work and domestic spaces, Avis tries to take her aunt's lessons regarding home management seriously. Although she is still young, Avis realizes that someone must cook meals, clean the home, and sew clothes. She also recognizes that women traditionally perform these tasks. Avis never questions the gendered nature of the domestic sphere. In fact, both Phelps and her heroine value women's traditional roles. In her biography of Phelps, Lori Duin Kelly notes that "in spite of Phelps' active efforts to encourage women to explore other careers outside the traditional ones, she nevertheless had enormous respect for the institutions of wifedom and motherhood, and nowhere in her fiction does she

deride women who chose these more traditional roles” (96). In fact, through her presentation of Chloe and Avis’s friend Coy, both of whom feel it is their duty or even their calling, to pursue lives within the domestic sphere, Phelps can be seen as “celebrat[ing] and defend[ing] these spheres of female activity” (96). In her fiction, particularly *The Story of Avis*, Phelps does not question the value or relevance of traditionally feminine roles and spaces; rather, Phelps argues that each woman should be able to choose her life, not have her life chosen for her solely on the basis of custom. Phelps uses Avis to claim that young girls should not be forced to conform to a constructed ideal of womanhood.³⁷ Women should have the space, both literal and figurative, to choose their own lives. Further, Phelps questions the definition of a lady. As Avis tells her father after he reprimands her for not helping Chloe around the house enough,

I’d rather not be a lady. There are other people in the world than ladies. And I hate to make my bed; and I hate, hate, to sew chemises; and I hate, hate, *hate*, to go cooking round the kitchen. It makes a crawling down my back to sew. But the crawling comes from the hating: the more I hate, the more I crawl. And mamma never cooked about the kitchen. (*Avis* 27)

Prior to her diatribe against cooking and sewing, Avis makes it very clear that her feelings of hatred are not connected with her aunt, telling her father “I like aunt *Chloe*” (27). Avis has great respect for her aunt, and as the novel progresses, Avis comes to her often for guidance and counsel. Avis hates the relatively limited view of womanhood that Chloe tries to enforce upon her, however. Thus, “Avis identifies more with her deceased mother,” who granted her the room in which to discover herself, than Chloe, “who epitomizes the traditional woman” (Boyd 97). With her decision not to become “the traditional woman,” Avis learns that she must adapt herself to the gendered spatial arrangement of the home, her community, and the world at large.

As I begin to discuss the role of interior and exterior spaces represented in the novel, I first want to consider the significance of the novel's setting, which I argue helps explain Avis's extreme desire and need for a career. Harmouth is a fictional New England town, which is home to a college of the same name. In fact, the entire community seems to exist because of the college. Every male character in the novel works at the college, attends the college, or administers to the college population in some way. For example, Professor Dobell is a professor of Ethics and Intellectual Philosophy at Harmouth; Philip begins his career at Harmouth as a student before working as a tutor and eventually becoming a professor of Geology; and John Rose, Coy's husband, attends Harmouth as a seminary student before he assumes the ministry of a local church. From the opening of the novel, Phelps emphasizes the presence of the college, its importance in the community, and the effect it has upon the local women's lives, particularly the wives, sisters, and daughters of Harmouth faculty members.

Perhaps more than women of other communities, Harmouth women outwardly confound the stereotypes of nineteenth-century American women. Harmouth women, the moniker by which they refer to themselves, are well read, educated, and outspoken. They organize and attend study groups on Chaucer and Spenser; they read and speak German and Latin; and they are well versed in science and mathematics. Harmouth women, by mere virtue of living in a college community that values education and self-improvement, are "not ignorant . . . [their minds were] stocked with facts sufficient" enough to undertake the rigorous course of study offered at Harmouth Female Seminary (*Avis* 3). Thus, Avis grows up in a community that prides itself on producing young women who can hold their own with their intellectual husbands, fathers, and brothers. Yet the women are neither permitted to enroll at Harmouth, nor do many of them attend any of the female seminaries in New England.

The education that Harmouth girls receive seems to mirror closely what educational reformers such as Catharine Beecher advocated. According to critic Lora Romero, Beecher “believed that patriarchal interests had dictated the content of female education. In instructing girls exclusively in the ornamental graces requisite” for marrying well, “that education had privileged the development of certain pleasing and marketable skills in women, accomplishments such as dancing and piano playing” (75). Women, then, were seen as little more than commodities who could improve the societal position of both their natal families and their husbands’ families through their accomplishments. Beecher and other domestic ideologues sought to create “an educational method that . . . would cultivate the whole woman instead of only a few marketable accomplishments” (75). Beecher also wanted to “institute the home, rather than the marriage market, as the focus of female education” in an attempt to create what Romero terms an “integrated female self” (76). Thus, Beecher believed women needed to be prepared for a life in the private sphere, where they would spend most of their adult lives, rather than for “a lifetime in the ballroom, the theater, or drawing room” (76). The emphasis on domestic education “represents an attempt to make duty and desire coincident, to imagine a form of household government that would enhance, not undermine subjectivity” (76). Harmouth women are seemingly educated according to these precepts. While they are prepared to participate actively in the intellectual life of their community, they are also expected to live their lives within the domestic sphere and are not encouraged to seek careers beyond the home. The young women of Harmouth are brought up to be intelligent, articulate, and, to some degree, free-thinking individuals. As soon as they come of age, however, they are expected to embrace the traditional roles of wife and mother. In spite of their liberal view of women’s education, the residents of Harmouth, much like Beecher, do not possess liberal views on women’s roles. In

fact, men's and women's roles are clearly delineated in Harmouth: the men work, while the women stay home.

By and large, Harmouth women are educated so well in order to prepare them to be better wives and mothers—indeed, so that they can be better members of the Harmouth community—to their husbands and sons, who either teach at or attend Harmouth. Critic Christine Stansell observes that despite the extensive and liberal education that Harmouth women receive they are still “subjugated” by convention (247). In fact, the Harmouth women closely mimic the model of womanhood that historian Linda Kerber has defined as the “Republican Mother” (202). According to Kerber, the “Republican Mother” is “self-reliant (within limits); literate, untempted by the frivolities of fashion. She had a responsibility to the political scene, though not to act on it . . . her competence did not extend to the making of political decisions. Her political task was accomplished within the confines of her family” (202). The “Republican Mother,” then, was responsible for educating her sons to be proper citizens, influencing her husband's public behavior, and raising her daughters to follow in her foot-steps (203). The best model of “Republican motherhood” in Harmouth is Coy, who recognizes that Avis is different: “Avis had got into the papers. It was seldom that a Harmouth woman got into the papers. It was only men—at Harmouth: indeed, the University existed, she supposed for the glorification of men. This was all right and proper. Coy had never been aware of any depressing aspirations toward the college diploma” (*Avis* 8). Coy, like most other young women in the community, participates in the study groups and follows the edicts of self-improvement because it is expected of her. She also marries, has children, and manages a home for her family because that is the role she is expected (and desires) to play. Neither Harmouth nor Beecher account for young women, such as Avis, whose desire and duty are at odds. Avis, then, is surrounded by similarly educated women, but she alone wants a career rather than a family. By presenting Avis

as an anomaly, even in a liberal-minded place like Harmouth, Phelps highlights the irony that Harmouth women receive a very privileged education that they are discouraged to use beyond the walls of their homes. Harmouth women are no more expected to transgress the spatial divisions of the public and private spheres than most women of this time period. Avis, for her part, recognizes the difficulty in transgressing these divisions, including the gendered divisions in education. These divisions become most apparent when she realizes she cannot receive the artistic education she desires in America. Before she realizes that such divisions exist, however, Avis first determines that she wants to be an artist. Her father's reaction to this decision has as much impact on her as growing up in a seemingly liberal minded town like Harmouth.

Avis first realizes she wants to be an artist at 16, after re-reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. The realization comes upon her while she sits in the "highest, airiest branch of the highest tree in the orchard," which she had climbed "principally because aunt Chloe said it was unladylike to climb" (Avis 30). Sitting in the apple tree, clutching her well-worn "little blue-and-gold girls' copy of 'Aurora Leigh,'" Avis determines "to solve the problem of her whole long life" (30, 32); she turns her face to the sky and says aloud "I am alive. What did God mean by that?" (32). Here, surrounded by limbs and leaves, listening to robins sing, and reading a poem by and about a well-known poetess, Avis ponders her own purpose in life. Suddenly, Avis, "who had rather take her painting-lesson than go to the senior party," realizes she wants to be an artist (32). The space she occupies, as much as Browning's poem,³⁸ inspires Avis's realization. High in the apple tree, Avis is able to consider her life far from any domestic spaces. That Avis is removed from any domestic spaces when she comes to this conclusion emphasizes her love of art and nature, which she sees as inextricably connected to one another. Her decision, then, is based purely on her own love of painting rather than her distaste for domestic work. Because she is out of doors, Avis has the space to experience this almost

transcendental moment of awareness, and following the Transcendental view of God, Avis seems to recognize her own innate spirituality and God's presence within her in this moment. As Ralph Waldo Emerson suggests in "Nature," Avis "see[s] all" and she becomes "part or parcel of God" (26). Following Emerson's description of the individual's relationship with nature and her own deep love for the natural world, Avis cannot have this realization anywhere but outdoors. Avis, much like Emerson himself, is a "lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets and villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature" (26). Avis's gaze, therefore, turns inward even as she observes nature, and she knows suddenly and without any doubt "why she was alive; what God meant by making her; what he meant by her being Avis Dobell, and reading just that thing that morning in the apple-boughs" (*Avis* 32). As soon as she experiences this realization, Avis climbs out of the tree and goes straight to her father's study to tell him of her plan.

Her father does not share Avis's joy when he hears her announcement that she wants to become an artist. In fact, he tells her that her dream is "nonsense" and that he does not want her to fill her "head with any of these womanish apings of a man's affairs, like a monkey playing tunes on a hand-organ" (*Avis* 33). He responds with "irritability not common with him in his treatment of his little daughter," and Avis is so taken aback by his sudden anger that she is unable to respond (33).³⁹ She simply stands before him like a child who has been chastised. Outside, Avis felt empowered and emboldened by her epiphany that she is meant to be a painter, but once she steps foot into her father's study, she allows herself to be silenced and is largely unable to respond to him. Even as her father softens and says to her "Make yourself happy with your paint-box," Avis remains silent (34). She makes one final attempt to explain herself, telling her father "I do not wish to make pretty little copies . . . I wish to be educated. I want to be

thoroughly educated in art” (34). Professor Dobell responds more gently to this declaration; he reminds Avis that she will go to Europe to learn about art “like other educated young ladies” and agrees to send her to “the Art School, if that will make you happy” (34). He concludes by telling her to kiss him and sends her off to help Aunt Chloe. In her father’s study, a space that is defined as masculine, Avis is unable to express her desire to become an artist in terms her father understand, nor is Professor Dobell able to see Avis’s desire as anything more than a young woman’s passing fancy. Although she tries to make her father understand her ambition to become an artist, she is unsuccessful at making her father either listen to her or understand her.

This exchange with her father marks a pattern that recurs throughout Avis’s life. Time and again, Avis experiences an epiphany about herself or her life in an outdoor interstitial space, but when she goes inside, ostensibly to share her realizations with someone she loves, Avis finds she cannot express herself effectively—or at all—once she is in a location that is clearly defined as an interior space, be that space masculine or feminine. Her father effectively silences Avis, and he is able to do this largely because of the masculine space they occupy during this discussion. In order to overcome this silencing, Avis must disobey her father and the gendered role suggested by the space of the story in order to determine how to achieve her dream on her own.

Like most young girls of the upper-middle class in nineteenth-century America, Avis has taken art lessons, but these lessons are meant to make her “an educated young lad[y],” not to help her become a successful artist (*Avis* 30). Further, as Kessler points out in her introduction to the novel, there were few opportunities for women to receive advanced training in art. Aside from a “female life class,” which had been offered “on a limited basis since 1868 at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts,” American women could not study art at an advanced level in their own country (xiv). As many other American women artists did in the nineteenth century,

including Mary Cassatt, Edmonia Lewis, and Lilla Cabot Perry, Avis wants to study “the Masters, whom she must seek in European studios and galleries” (xiv).⁴⁰ While women, including Avis we must presume, were not readily welcomed into European art programs, they were, in most cases, able to find European teachers willing to instruct them. Avis’s American art teacher, Frederick Maynard, realizing Avis’s talent exceeds his own, sends her to study under his former teacher Francesco Saverio Altamura, a well known Italian painting teacher (*Avis* 36).⁴¹ While abroad, “Avis shared the fate of most American art-students in Italy at that time. She simply spent two years unlearning, that she might begin again” (37). She also experiences a sense of freedom that she hasn’t known since her childhood days of exploring Harmouth’s beaches and fields.

The freedom Avis feels during her six year stay in Europe can be attributed primarily to two facts: how she came to stay in Europe for so long and the lack of social and familial pressures she feels while she is in Europe. At nineteen, “having finished, as one was careful to say in Harmouth, her *school* education,” Avis travels to Europe with Coy for a year (*Avis* 35).⁴² There, the young women are expected to see the sights and practice their French. At the end of the year, they will return to Harmouth as accomplished and well-traveled young women. Avis, however, decides to stay. She writes to her father, asking his permission “that she be permitted to remain for an indefinite time and study art” (35). Here, Avis takes her future into her own hands and chooses her own way. Rather than ask her father in person and risk his further admonishments that her art is “nonsense” (33), Avis seeks his approval once she is already in Europe, knowing that her father’s control over her from such a distance is more limited. Her one act of defiance works in her favor; she successfully convinces Professor Dobell of her desire and determination to become a painter, as evidenced by his response by her request to stay: “It is the custom, in the training of carrier-doves, to let them all loose from their place of confinement into

the upper air; but those which do not return readily without interference are cast aside as too dull to be worth the trouble of further education” (35). Her interference, her refusal to do what everyone, her father included, expects of her is what convinces her father that she should be allowed to pursue her dream.

Avis’s sense of freedom, which begins to develop when she tells her father of her plans to stay in Europe, continues to grow because of the lack of familial and societal pressure she experiences. Alone in Europe, Avis must take control of her own life. She must seek out an art instructor on her own, she must find her own lodgings, and she must make her own way. While she is most definitely receiving money from her father, she is responsible only for herself. She has no responsibilities, no household chores, no domestic lessons to learn. She can—and does—devote every waking moment to developing her talent. She receives training and encouragement she would not have received had she stayed in Harmouth. In the studios of her European teachers, removed from the expectation that she must learn how to be a proper woman, Avis locates a sense of artistic freedom she could not have experienced in Harmouth and transgresses many of the barriers that would have made it more difficult for her to become an artist had she stayed in her own country. Europe, then, becomes an interstitial space for Avis because, even though she must still grapple with certain gendered divisions (including the fact that she can only seek out private instruction rather than attend a university program) while she is there she is exempt from the domestic demands that are imposed upon her in Harmouth.

Europe can further be seen as an interstitial space for Avis because, while she is a student, she is also free from the professional pressures she experiences when she returns to Harmouth. While her European teachers believe Avis is talented, they do not overwhelm her with the same pressure that Maynard does. They do urge her to continue working and “to make a reputation” (37), but unlike Maynard, they are not personally invested in her success. They see

her as a talented student who has a great deal of potential, whereas Maynard views her as a prodigy and seems to believe Avis's success will bring him some fame. Thus, her European art teachers are willing to allow Avis to choose her own path—be it art or something more conventional. Maynard, however, consistently pressures Avis to privilege her art above every other aspect of her life, which she finds almost as stifling as Aunt Chloe's insistence that she learn to make bread. In Europe, Avis is able to learn and to develop without fear of failure. Her European teachers give her the space to come into her own as an artist, much the same way her mother gave her the space to explore life as a child. The interstitial environment of Europe nourishes Avis, both as an artist and as a woman. She returns to Harmouth more confident in her talent and more determined to follow her own path in life.

Following her return from Europe, Avis realizes that she is expected, to some extent, to return to her traditional feminine duties; she must resume her domestic education and help Chloe in the kitchen once again, despite the attention she is receiving for her art. She gradually begins to understand that she cannot transgress the spatial divisions of the home, no matter how successful she becomes. She, therefore, does not transgress the gendered spaces of the home as much as she creates an interstitial space of her own through her love of nature and her studio. Further, Avis begins to consciously move from interstitial spaces, such as her studio or Chloe's gardens, to spaces that are clearly defined as private in order to fulfill her duties to her family and to continue developing as an artist. She continues to make such conscious moves between interstitial and private spaces throughout the novel.

Phelps's own experience as a writer made her aware of how much an artist needs her own space to work in. Like many women writers of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Phelps did not have a specific space designated for her writing. In *Chapters of a Life*, Phelps describes writing wherever she could find a quiet space for herself: "Sometimes I got over an

open register in a lower room, and wrote in the faint puffs of damp air that played with my misery. Sometimes I sat in the cellar itself; but it was rather dark, and one cherished a consciousness of mice” (84). Even in these out-of-the-way locations, Phelps was frequently interrupted by domestic disturbances, particularly as she was often called upon to care for her younger siblings (Coffey 24). Only after *The Gates Ajar* became a critical and financial success did Phelps’s family realize she needed a private space in which to write. At first Phelps was permitted to write in “a sunny room in the farmhouse of the seminary estate; a large, old-fashioned building next to my father’s house” (CL 115). As demand for her work grew, she eventually moved to the summer-house in her father’s garden, which had been her mother’s study.⁴³ Perhaps because of her own struggles to claim a space where she could focus on her writing, Phelps has Avis struggle not at all, at least initially.

When Avis returns from Europe, amidst growing critical awareness of her talent, she simply claims a space on her father’s property as her studio. She takes over a room of the summer-house, which is located in Aunt Chloe’s extensive gardens. Avis comes to view her small studio as her sanctuary; it is the only interior location described in the entire novel where she can work uninterrupted. There she can spread out and organize her materials without fearing that she will have to move them, and she can also contemplate her latest project without risk of intrusion.

That Avis is given this space without incident is telling of her father’s growing acceptance of her determination to become a painter. An expert in his own field, Professor Dobell seems more willing to listen to those he considers experts in art; once Avis’s teachers tell him she has talent, he begins to encourage his daughter’s dream. Further, he realizes he is not able to judge Avis’s talent himself, and he determines, much like her mother did before him, to give Avis the room, both physical and metaphorical, to develop her talent, telling her,

“omnipotent Nature is wiser than I. I should be duller than the dullest bird among them all, if I could not trust you at her hands” (*Avis* 35). From this point in the novel, Professor Dobell is supportive of Avis’s career, and he keeps the summer-house as a studio space even after Avis marries and moves into her own home.

The studio itself is an ideal space for Avis. It is a small “summer-house,” which Aunt Chloe also uses as a garden nursery (56). While Avis paints and sketches in one room, Chloe transplants and cultivates her flowers in another. The studio’s garden location heightens its interstitiality. While it is an interior space, it is constructed in such a way that the outdoors seem to be inside, and even though she is indoors, she is protected from the elements, which allows Avis to feel as though she is still surrounded by nature, which is one marker of the space’s interstitiality. The summer house is encircled by Chloe’s large flower beds, including her pansies and lady’s-delights. Inside, while she works, Avis is watched by robins who peer at her “with [a] curious glance upon the window ledge,” and “a ground-sparrow who had built her nest just beneath the wooden doorstep twittered in a tender monotone.” She can hear “the boughs of the budding apple-trees hit the glass with slender finger-tips,” and the room is lit by “the dumb sunlight” as it “crawled inch by inch, like a sleeping child across the steps, and in upon the floor” (56). Through the open windows, Avis can also faintly hear the waves crashing upon the shore. Thus, the studio, unlike most interior spaces she occupies, makes her feel closer to nature. Rather than feeling restricted and confined as she does in the kitchen and the sitting room, Avis feels empowered and inspired in her studio. Additionally, its location is so far removed from her father’s house that she can work without fear of disruption. She cannot hear the noise of the kitchen or afternoon callers rapping on the door, nor can she see the pile of mending Chloe needs her help to finish. Because it is removed from the home, it is not a strictly domestic space, and as such, domesticity does not intrude there. Similarly, it is not a public studio space where art

critics and patrons could come and solicit or critique Avis's work. The studio exists as a completely separate world for Avis—one in which she can continue to develop and explore her talent without fear of critique or interruption. In the interstitial space of the studio, she is protected from the prying eyes of both the citizens of Harmouth and those of the art world. She need not consider anyone else's desires or expectations but her own. Her studio is one of the most important interstitial spaces in the novel, and Avis immediately recognizes it as such. When Avis arrives home after her six-year sojourn in Europe, she wants "a clean, cold, barren start," and her studio, removed as it is from both the public and the private realms, grants her the space for such a start (*Avis* 78). In her studio, she experiences a sense of "triumphant rebellion" because its "four walls shut out the world from the refined license of her mood" (79). Thus, her studio offers her a sense of artistic freedom that no other space in the novel does, and Avis is aware every time that she enters it that she is occupying an interstitial location.

Avis's studio is further significant because it is one of only a few interior spaces that can be defined as interstitial, and thus, she is able fully to express her feelings and voice her determination to become a painter there. Whereas she is repeatedly unable to speak her mind in either her father's or Philip's studies or Aunt Chloe's or her own kitchen, she is able to do so in her studio on at least one occasion. On the same evening that Avis shows Philip the portrait she painted of him, Philip declares he is in love with her and demands a similar declaration in return. Because they are in her studio when Philip confesses his feelings for her, Avis is able to stand her ground and firmly dismiss his declaration, even as he insists that she also loves him. She vehemently responds "I deny it!" and chastises him for presuming to know her heart (*Avis* 64). Philip, however, repeatedly interrupts her, saying "I presume to say that I love you . . . I quite dare to say that I love you. I know what I am saying. I love you, love you!" (64). Had Philip confronted her in her father's studio or in the kitchen, he may have succeeded in convincing

Avis of his feelings and silencing her, as he does later in the novel when their confrontations occur in more private, feminine spaces. Indeed, the entire scene is reminiscent of Professor Dobell's refusal to listen to Avis when, at sixteen, she announced her desire to become an artist. The key differences, however, are that the confrontation occurs in a space that Avis controls and that, in her studio, Avis refuses to be silenced: "I hope, Mr. Ostrander, that you may find yourself as much mistaken in your own feeling as you have been, so extraordinarily in mine. It will undoubtedly be so. Nothing is easier than to overestimate the depth of a passing influence" (65). Perhaps because he is unable to convince her that he truly loves her or perhaps because she refuses to allow him to overpower her with his emotions or his arguments, Philip does not confront Avis in her studio again. In fact, he is seen in her studio only one other time in the novel—on their wedding day, at which time he assures her that she has given up nothing by marrying him and that she will have a studio of her own in their home (127). Once they marry, however, Philip quickly forgets his promise of a studio, proving that he neither knew Avis very well nor did he take her talent and commitment to her work as seriously as her father, her aunt, and she herself do.

That Philip does not know Avis very well is reinforced by his continued pursuit of her, even though she initially does not waiver in her vehement refusals. In fact, Philip does not even allow a full day to pass after their first confrontation before he renews his attempt to convince Avis that they are suited for one another, but as he did when he approached her in her studio, Philip chooses the wrong setting in which to confront Avis. This time he finds her outdoors, "wandering in the fields about the shore," and Avis, seemingly drawing strength from her natural surroundings, is prepared for "battle" (*Avis* 66). Indeed, Lori Duin Kelly observes that Philip's proposal to Avis is "described in martial terms" (101), and Phelps does employ language that seems more fitting describing a battle scene than a marriage proposal. Avis is "a woman armed"

and “garrison[ed]” (*Avis* 63, 66). Philip and Avis confront one another, “flashing like duelists” (64). When Avis refuses to “yield,” Philip is forced to admit that he has “failed to conquer” her and retreats (67, 69). Phelps’s word choice is key here, as it renders Philip and Avis’s courtship more like a war and less like a series of romantic meetings. Further, by employing military language, Phelps suggests that Philip only succeeds in convincing Avis to marry him because he has waged the more successful campaign and has, thus, managed to wear Avis down.

Although Philip has carefully prepared for his second encounter with Avis by considering every response she may make to his argument for their marriage, he again fails to convince her to marry him, and his failure occurs, at least in part, because he has chosen to confront her outdoors, in a space that both Phelps and Avis clearly see as interstitial. In the fields near the shore, they are neither in a public or a private place. Far removed from the interior spaces that Avis finds so oppressive, she is able to rely upon nature as a source of strength, which can be seen in the way she constantly moves among the fields in this scene. Rather than sitting and passively listening to Philip present his argument, Avis “walk[s] restlessly to and fro through the long, impeding grass” (*Avis* 66). In order to be heard, Philip must walk with her because she refuses to stop. When they do sit, it is only because Philip “[throws] himself at her feet” (67). Even then they are separated by a “cordon of tall daisies that leaped uncrushed between them” (67). Throughout this conversation, Avis turns away from Philip, either to observe the “mid-day sun” or “the restless sea,” both of which she seems to “gather courage from” (68, 70, 68). Thus, Avis sees the outdoors as empowering, and she relies upon each of these natural elements—the daisies, the sun, and the sea—to remind her that she is making the right decision by refusing to marry Philip. Each time she pauses in her refusal of Philip to study some part of the natural world, she is gathering strength, collecting her thoughts, and considering her next response. Because they occupy a space that is not traditionally

feminine, Avis is able to both listen to Philip and to express her own views, clearly and carefully. Whereas she often finds herself unable to voice her opinion when she is indoors, she refuses to be silenced outdoors, particularly in spaces she sees as interstitial. In fact, she thoughtfully counters Philip's every point regarding marriage, until he must concede defeat. Only after Philip leaves does Avis show any sign that their meeting has weakened her. Avis falls to the ground and sinks "down among the daisies, throwing her arms above her head, among their roots. She was worn with the strain of the last few days. She thrust her cheek down into the cool, clean earth, and let the grass close over her young head" (72). Her fall to the ground appears to be an attempt to restore herself, emotionally and physically, by returning to the earth. This scene marks both an emotional change in Avis and a spatial shift in the novel. Avis, whom Phelps describes as "weary," "drawn," and "despair[ing]" at this point, withdraws from life and spends most of her time in her studio, where she buries herself in work (74, 76, 77).

That she isolates herself in her studio seems to suggest that Avis is content with her decision to refuse Philip and focus on her career. I contend, however, that this move indoors, even to a space she has previously found restorative, signifies Avis's doubt in her talent and her life choices. As her doubt grows, she does not seek out the fields, the beaches, or the orchards she has found comforting in the past; rather, she remains ensconced in her studio with the blinds "closely drawn" (*Avis* 76). For the first time since she has returned from Europe, the interstitiality of the studio neither inspires nor empowers Avis. The studio reminds her of Philip's first proposal, and so long as she is there, she is unable to stop thinking of Philip. Avis finally leaves her studio, turning her canvases to the wall so as not to be reminded of the paintings she cannot finish (78). After her studio confrontation with Philip, Avis no longer finds her studio to be as inspiring and comforting as she did before Philip proposed to her. In fact, she is largely unable to separate her memory of him and their argument from the space, and he

occupies her thoughts every time she enters her studio to work. His presence there has compromised the safety of the studio. To escape her memories of Philip, Avis sets her work aside for more traditionally feminine work and spaces; she helps Chloe, Coy, and the other women of Harmouth roll bandages for the wounded of Bull Run. Her decision to participate in such domestic activities suggests that Avis is contemplating another type of life—one in which marriage figures prominently. Throughout this section of the novel, Avis is rarely seen in interstitial spaces, as the ones she has grown to love, primarily her studio and Harmouth's fields and beaches, have ceased to bring her any solace. Phelps implies that these spaces are now tainted for Avis, as Philip had challenged her directly in each of these spaces. While she was able to express her views of marriage in each of these spaces, she has been deeply affected by each altercation with Philip. She is beginning to question her life choices and doubt her ability to become a successful painter.

As she leaves interstitial spaces behind, Avis turns to more traditionally feminine spaces. She chooses these spaces, such as the parlor and the sitting room,⁴⁴ primarily because she has nowhere else to go to consider her future (*Avis* 79). While these spaces grant Avis the room to forget about Philip, as she is constantly occupied by mundane domestic tasks in these spaces, they do not, however, bring her any solace either. Throughout this section of the novel, Avis's work and her studio remain on the periphery; she is aware of them and determined to return to them, but she consciously avoids both. Even Aunt Chloe notices that Avis has not entered her studio for several days and asks if it is too hot; Avis does not address her aunt's concerns, telling her instead "I shall get to work tomorrow" (78). Coy, who is preparing for her own marriage, also recognizes a change in Avis and visits her to offer her help and advice. Although Avis does not tell Coy that she is considering a more traditional future, Coy seems to sense that Avis's internal struggle. Unlike Aunt Chloe, who only hints at a problem, Coy addresses Avis's fears

directly, telling her: “you know you never, never will be [like other women], as I’ve said in your defence a hundred times” (sic 86). That both Coy and Aunt Chloe understand that marriage would not benefit Avis is key: they, and by extension Phelps, understand that not all women are meant to live out their lives in traditional spaces. Through Avis, Phelps argues that some women need interstitial spaces to survive; if Avis chooses to marry Philip, she will have to forsake the interstitial spaces she values so much for the private spaces of the home, which she will surely find stifling. Unfortunately, Avis fails to see her need for interstitial spaces as clearly as either Aunt Chloe or Coy.

It is in this uncertain and questioning state that Philip, who has enlisted in the Union Army in an attempt to forget Avis, finds Avis when he returns from the war severely wounded. Once he recovers enough to leave his sick-bed, Philip renews his pursuit of Avis. Following the novel’s move away from nature, their subsequent exchanges occur either indoors or in what I will term perimeter spaces—locations that are ostensibly outdoors but that are clearly connected to interior spaces, such as Aunt Chloe’s gardens and Professor Dobell’s porch. These spaces serve as perimeters between the private spaces of the home and the public spaces of Harmouth and the university in general. Thus, they fulfill a distinct purpose: they act as transition spaces between the public and private realms, granting people time and space to acclimate themselves to the private sphere if they are leaving the public sphere and vice versa. These perimeter spaces differ from the locations I have defined as interstitial primarily because Avis can neither claim them as her own nor do they empower her in any significant way. Additionally, these spaces are key to Avis’s eventual decision to marry Philip. In these spaces, Avis is neither completely removed from nature, nor is she entirely indoors. These spaces represent her growing self-doubt, which increases the longer it takes her to become known as an artist. Whereas Avis finds her studio and the orchards empowering, she finds the porch and the house gardens stifling because

of their proximity to the interior spaces she dislikes so much. The farther removed Avis is from true outdoor spaces and her studio the more susceptible she becomes to Philips's arguments regarding marriage. Eventually, Philip is able to wear Avis down by visiting her in a series of spaces that are farther and farther from nature.

After his return from the war, Philip seeks out Avis and finds her standing on the stone wall that acts as a breaker for Harmouth's beaches. As I stated earlier in the section, the stone wall serves as both a physical and a metaphorical barrier for Avis. Physically it divides the beach from the fields of Harmouth and separates Avis and Philip during this confrontation. Metaphorically, it divides the two sides of Avis: the side that is aligned with nature and art and the side that desires love. Further, Avis is the only one who can choose whether to leave the wall for the beach or the meadows, and she alone can also choose the life of an artist or the life of a wife and a mother. Phelps, then, makes Avis responsible for the outcome of her own life. When Avis, slowly and deliberately, chooses to climb down from the wall into the fields of Harmouth, the side closest to Philip, Avis consciously chooses a life that will require her to put her own needs and desires behind those of her husband and any children they may have. Phelps is not, then, critiquing marriage as a whole; rather she is critiquing the inability of marriage and society to accommodate the creative and intellectual aspirations of both husband and wife. The stone wall emphasizes that Avis must choose one path over another because, at this point in time, Phelps argues a woman cannot successfully combine family and career.

As Avis climbs down from the wall and moves to stand near Philip, a change "crept over her face" (*Avis* 99). It is "the marvelous and magnificent change wrought upon a woman's face" by "love" (99). Although Avis does not yet agree to marry Philip, she does admit her love for him. Her confession is again framed in martial language and signals that the change goes further than her facial expression:

In yielding her confession, she seemed already to have yielded some impalpable portion of her personality . . . Her blending consciousness of having taken the first step in a road which led to some undefined but imperative surrender had an effect upon her incalculable to one familiar only with a simpler type of woman. She did not look subdued, only startled. And, when [Philip] reverently extended his thin hand again towards her, she shrank, with widening, fear-stricken eyes. (101)

Avis, thus, realizes the ramifications of her love for Philip, and she still does not agree to marry him. It takes two more meetings, both of which occur indoors, before Avis accepts his proposal.

Avis and Philip next meet in her father's studio, the room where Avis tried unsuccessfully to tell her father of her dream to be an artist. Again, Avis chooses this ostensibly masculine space to explain her feelings to a man she cares for deeply, and again, Avis finds that she is not heard. Just as her father dismissed her desire to become a painter, Philip dismisses her concerns about marriage, telling her "Marriage is not to be treated with such personal irreverence or rebellion . . . It really is the best plan Almighty God could contrive for us" (*Avis* 107). Philip does listen to Avis more thoughtfully to her than her father did, yet despite the obvious care with which he listens, he still does not seem to hear her because he repeatedly refuses her one request. Philip refuses to "Help [Avis] say no" because her desire is contrary to his own (108). This scene exposes the key difference between Philip and Avis. Philip wants Avis to marry him because he believes it will make him happy; Avis continues to refuse Philip because she knows their marriage will eventually make them both unhappy. Even as Avis tells Philip this, saying "you should be merciful to yourself and me," Philip will not admit that she may be right (108). Several days later, Avis finally agrees to marry Philip. She accepts his proposal while standing in the doorway of her father's dining room, a room that is traditionally marked as feminine.

Even as she tells him of her decision, Avis reminds him she does not want to be a traditional wife. The space they occupy, however, seems to cancel out her declarations as her acceptance marks the beginning of her domestic life and the end of her artistic one.

To his credit, Philip does try to take Avis's needs and wishes into consideration, and he promises her a different type of marriage than those they have both known. He tells her that he has no desire for a conventional wife, assuring Avis "I do not want your work, or your individuality. I refuse to accept any such sacrifice from the woman I love . . . A man ought to be above it. Let me be that man" (*Avis* 107). Philip "vows that he will make marriage compatible with her work" (Stansell 248). He does attempt to keep his promises; he helps Avis find a hired girl to do all of the housework, and he encourages her to paint. But even as he makes these well-intentioned vows to Avis, it is clear that he has not fully considered the implications of marrying an unconventional woman:

Ostrander uttered this daring sentiment as ardently as if he had ever thought of it before, and as sincerely as if it had been the watchword of his life. He felt himself at that moment in the radiation of a great truth that blazed from her ringing voice and her intrenched beauty. He seemed to himself to be the discoverer of a new type of womanhood, to which, as we do in the presence of all ideals, he instinctively brought his own nature to the rapid test. (*Avis* 107)

Despite Philip's initial declaration that their marriage and his individual needs will not interfere with Avis's career, Philip does privilege his own needs before Avis's. As he becomes consumed by his teaching and research, he allows his "egocentric demands [to] prevent [Avis] from setting up her studio" or attending to her own work (Stansell 249). Philip quickly forgets many of his promises to Avis, including the studio and his assurances that she need not be a cook or a housekeeper, only his wife.

For her part, Avis struggles to adapt to life as a newlywed, and as much as she seems to love Philip, she never feels at home in the house he chose for them. Unlike her father's house, which is on the outskirts of Harmouth and is near the beach and the fields Avis loves, Philip and Avis's home is in the center of Harmouth. Removed from a natural setting, Avis is

like a bird that has flown through a window by mistake. The sea could be heard, but not seen, from her chamber-window. The noise from the street interrupted the library. It was not quite clear where [Avis's] studio was to be, unless in the attic. But there were elms in the yard, and crocuses in the garden, and the house stood at three minutes' walk from the college green. (*Avis* 129-30)

Avis tries to focus on the good things about her new home, but she deeply regrets the loss of her studio and being so far from the beach and the fields that surrounded her childhood home. She eventually does claim the attic as her studio, and Philip tells her that they will renovate it to make it more suitable to her needs. The promised renovations are, however, put off repeatedly, and as Avis finds herself increasingly consumed by the demands of running a home and Philip's own neediness, she must often set her own work aside only minutes after taking it up. In the first year of marriage, Avis frequently tells herself "By and by. After a while. I must wait a little" (149). Avis wants to believe that Philip will keep the promises he made to her before their marriage, but gradually Avis realizes that she has compromised her love of art—and to some degree, her love of herself—for her love of Philip.

This compromise is best symbolized in the spatial shift that occurs in this section of the novel. Once Avis and Philip marry, Avis moves indoors. Prior to their engagement, Avis is rarely shown indoors, and when she is indoors, she is never shown completing domestic tasks. She is either at work in her studio, roaming the beaches and fields of Harmouth, or reading in her father's studio. Avis is shown talking to both Coy and Aunt Chloe in the bedroom and the

sitting room, but she is never seen cooking or sewing, although we do know Chloe has given her lessons in both from Chloe's comments about Avis's sour bread and uneven stitches (*Avis* 110). In fact, the early chapters of the novel are marked by Avis's unwillingness to complete any domestic task, and she is frequently reprimanded by her father and Chloe for not working around the house more. After she marries Philip, Avis is seen outside at two points in the novel. In the first scene, Philip finds Avis walking on the beach after he has questioned her ability to run their home smoothly, and in the final few chapters, Avis is out of doors often during a trip she takes to Florida with Philip.⁴⁵ This move indoors places Avis in interior, feminine spaces—spaces in which she is visibly uncomfortable, struggles to adapt, and is often unable to voice her needs, wants and feelings to either herself or her husband. She is rarely seen in the interstitial spaces, which she found both empowering and inspirational, again. The loss of her studio, her move to the center of town, and her inability to be in daily contact with nature all add to the increased isolation Avis feels the longer she is married—she feels isolated from Philip, from Coy and her family, and from herself and her talent.

Avis does try to quell her growing sense of isolation. She stays in contact with Coy, but seeing Coy happy in her marriage and reveling in motherhood only increases Avis's anxieties and her dissatisfaction with her own life. She continues to work when she is able to find the time, eventually taking over the un-renovated attic for her studio. Although the attic studio does afford Avis some privacy, its dark interior and small windows make it a far less inspiring place to work than the summer house studio she had at her father's. Further, its location does not allow her to be removed from the daily domestic dramas of her household. Because she is only on the top level of the house, she can be reached quickly by the hired girl, by the children, or by Philip in the event of any domestic catastrophe, no matter how small. In a particularly poignant scene, Phelps reminds her readers that most interruptions are not connected to any catastrophe.

Avis, trying to finish a painting in her studio, is constantly interrupted by her young son, Van Dyck.⁴⁶ Avis has hardly begun to work “when the studio-door shivered, stirred, and started with a prolonged and inspiring creak” (*Avis* 202). Van enters the studio to ask his mother for a piece of pumpkin pie, to ask her if she loves him more than his little sister, and to have her hear him say his prayers. After multiple intrusions, Avis must lock Van out of her attic studio to even set brush to canvas. Van continues to bother her, however, asking her numerous questions through the locked door, in spite of Avis’s admonishments to go to the kitchen. When Avis finally finishes for the day, she unlocks the studio door to find “Van all paint and patience, like a spaniel curled upon the floor, with his lips against the studio-door. The stout little lover, faithful in exile, has lain and kissed the threshold till he has kissed himself asleep” (203). Avis’s extreme frustration suggests that this scene repeats itself over and over again, and she must eventually accept that her time and her space are no longer her own. Rather than becoming bitter or resentful, however, Avis accepts the change in her life, aware that she chose to marry.

After her marriage, Avis becomes noticeably silent. During their brief courtship, Avis repeatedly challenged Philip, asserting her own opinions and making her own desires known, and she did so almost exclusively in interstitial spaces. Once they marry, however, Avis no longer has access to the interstitial spaces that she had valued so much. She is removed from both her summer house studio and the outdoor settings that sustained her. To survive her new life, Avis must consciously adopt a more conventional attitude and adapt herself to the private, interior spaces in which she primarily lives. Avis, therefore, tries to embrace the role she is expected to play—devoted wife and mother. She accepts that she must sublimate her creative desires, and she puts her children’s and her husband’s needs before her own. Perhaps to suggest how fully Avis has embraced the role and the spaces she previously eschewed, Phelps has her rarely question Philip after they marry. Phelps does recognize, however, that most women have

at least one space in their homes that they feel is theirs, whether it is coded as public, private, or interstitial. As such, Phelps grants Avis one space in which she is still able to express her feelings and to confront Philip: her bedroom.

As she does with the rest of the house, Avis takes great care in decorating her bedroom. The room, which is all “the shades of the rose,” has “a very fine East India Hammock, woven of a lithe pearl-white cord” (*Avis* 132, 133). Avis hangs the hammock “because, against the colors of the walls and drapery, it had a peculiarly delicate and negligent effect, grateful to her in the confined house” (133). Her room reflects Avis’s love of open spaces, and through the décor, which is simple and sparse, and the color,⁴⁷ which reminds her of her favorite flower, Avis attempts to bring the outdoors inside. Her room, despite its interior location, makes her feel as she did in her summer-house studio and on her long walks through the gardens and fields of Harmouth: she feels sheltered and protected from the daily domestic disturbances that cause her so much anxiety, while she simultaneously feels free enough to express herself.

In addition to providing Avis with a sense of freedom and comfort, her bedroom shares another trait with her old summer-house studio and Aunt Chloe’s gardens: her bedroom becomes a source of strength for Avis. The room can most clearly be seen as such because of its natural elements—its color and décor, its proximity to the city park, its large windows, and its openness. When Avis cannot escape the kitchen for the outdoors, she can escape to her room, and in spite of its interior location, it rejuvenates her similarly to the interstitiality of Harmouth’s fields and beaches. Much like the outdoor locations that Avis takes solace in, her bedroom becomes the only space in her home with Philip where she feels able to shed the role of silent and understanding wife and confront him about problems in their marriage. In fact, her bedroom is the only space in their home in which Avis openly confronts Philip.

In the first bedroom confrontation, Avis has just been visited by Susan Jessup, who poses as a bookseller in order to gain access to the Ostrandersons' home. In an awkward conversation, Susan tells Avis that she was engaged to Philip before he moved to Harmouth. Philip broke off the engagement unexpectedly and never saw Susan again. After Philip ended their relationship, Susan married an abusive man and blames Philip for her unhappiness. She visits Avis seemingly to warn her of Philip's capricious nature (*Avis* 160-64). Avis waits to tell Philip of Susan's visit until they are alone in her bedroom. On the surface, her decision to confront Philip in her bedroom seems to reveal little; this is, after all, a private matter that should be discussed in a private location. But this is the first time Avis has confronted Philip about anything since their marriage. That she chooses to do it in her bedroom signifies her attachment to the room—just as their earlier confrontations signified her attachment to her studio and the outdoors. That this scene takes place in her bedroom is equally significant as it emphasizes that this is the one space in the house that she feels is completely her own; this is the one space where she is not afraid to express herself and the one space that she maintains total control over.

In the course of the confrontation, Avis makes it clear to Philip that she not only feels disappointed and betrayed but also that her space has been invaded: "And [she] told me, Philip—in my own home—that she was once engaged to be married to my husband" (*Avis* 165). Avis's statement is crucial not only because she expresses her displeasure with Philip's behavior but also because it is one of the few times Avis claims the home she shares with Philip as her own. In her outrage, Avis does not relegate herself to a single space, nor does she claim an interstitial space as her own. Her reaction reveals that Avis has begun to accept that interstitial spaces, like her old studio and the outdoors, are no longer available to her. Her responsibilities to her family simply do not allow her to withdraw to interstitial spaces to empower herself; she must empower herself in the spaces that are available to her in a particular moment. And Avis, unlike other

characters and writers I will discuss in later sections, is in a position, as a white, middle-class, married woman, to claim power in the private spaces of her own home. Although interstitial spaces do ensure Avis the room to develop creatively and intellectually, she realizes that she does not need interstitial spaces to take control of her home. Through Avis's recognition, Phelps argues that women must claim whatever spaces are available to them as their own. While Phelps does not seem to doubt that Avis, and women like her, would have succeeded as an artist had she chosen to live her life in interstitial spaces, Phelps does not believe that Avis has given up her right to control her own home by choosing a path that she was poorly suited to. Avis, then, has merely exchanged one space for another; rather than forsaking her identity because she no longer has access to interstitial spaces, she must adjust her identity to the spaces that are currently available to her.

In this moment, Avis seems to realize finally that she is a wife and a mother, but she also remembers who she was before she became a wife and mother. Thus, she stops behaving as she believes a wife *should* behave and begins to assert her personality for the first time since she and Philip have married. Avis consciously chooses the power that private, feminine spaces offer her over interstitial spaces that are more ambiguously defined. In fact, she is so angry with Philip because he has compromised the sanctity of a home that she has only just begun to accept as her own and to feel comfortable in. Now that she is aware of Philip's fickle nature, Avis finds herself questioning everything he has ever said to her, especially his claims that he wants to create an equal marriage. In this moment, after learning Philip is not as honorable as she believed, Avis reverts to her former self: she ceases to be the quiet, compliant wife she has become and finds her voice again, confronting Philip and demanding an explanation. This confrontation signals a change in their marriage. Avis, who has struggled to view Philip as her equal partner since the birth of their son, begins to view Philip as a child who must be coddled

and cared for. Their relationship ceases to be that of husband and wife and slowly morphs into that of parent and child. Avis begins to feel that she must care for Philip in the same way she cares for their two young children. Just as she reconciles herself to this new reality, Avis find she must confront Philip again.

The second row occurs while Avis is getting over a serious bout of diphtheria. Her childhood friend Barbara Allen moves in to manage the household and care for the children while Avis recovers. One evening, Avis slowly walks down to the parlor to listen to Barbara playing the piano. She discovers Philip and Barbara sitting side by side on the piano bench, and “one of [Philip’s] arms was stretched out. . . It could not be said that it encircled Barbara’s waist; but there was no back to the piano-stool, and Barbara was tired. In his other hand he held, alas! he held her own” (*Avis* 184). When Avis interrupts this obviously private moment, “Barbara drew away her hand swiftly. [Philip] would not have had her do this: it was an implication which, he began angrily to say to himself, the circumstances did not call for” (185). As Philip quickly begins to explain to Avis that nothing has happened, Avis silently returns to her bedroom exhausted both by the effort of walking downstairs and by the realization that her husband is, as Susan Jessup warned her, “a capricious man” (193). The next day Avis lies in her bedroom and contemplates the scene between Philip and Barbara. She unwillingly recalls what Susan told her about Philip: “He got tired of me. I thought he would get tired of every other woman” (193). When Philip returns home that evening, he visits Avis in her bedroom and attempts to explain himself.

Avis’s response to Philip’s explanation is remarkably similar to her reaction at the end of their second discussion of marriage. At that earlier moment, Avis dropped to the earth, utterly exhausted physically and mentally. In this subsequent scene, Avis, displaying the same level of exhaustion, does not even leave her bed as Philip makes his excuses; in fact, when Philip begins

speaking to her, Avis stops him, saying “What is the use? . . . There is nothing to discuss” (Avis 194). For Avis, the humiliation of finding Philip embracing Barbara is more than she can bear. The discovery that “a man has ceased to love his wife” (194) brings all of Philip’s other faults into focus—his inability to sufficiently provide for his family, his disinterest in his children, and his numerous broken promises to Avis—and Avis is unable to deny any longer that she unwisely chose to marry Philip. In the safety of her bedroom, Avis is able to admit her mistake to herself and to Philip, and she seems to rely on her bedroom as a source of strength much as she drew strength from the earth in their earlier confrontation.

Avis’s ability to stand up to Philip in her bedroom is significant for several reasons. First, even though she is able to voice her opinions and feelings in her room, she remains remarkably silent in the rest of the house, including the kitchen and drawing room, two spaces that were sanctioned as feminine and that women supposedly maintained control over. Whereas women like Coy and Chloe, both examples of the “true woman,” find these spaces empowering, Avis finds them—and the duties associated with these rooms—so stifling that she is unable to respond to Philip’s demands that she be a better wife in either space.⁴⁸ Further, her ability to voice her unhappiness in their bedroom serves to emphasize Avis’s connection to nature. She has carefully designed the room to remind her of the outdoor spaces she loves so much—the very spaces, in fact, in which she has always been able to voice her feelings and express her emotions without hesitation. That she relies upon this space as a source of strength is then not surprising. Finally, the bedroom confrontations are key because they mark the first times Avis is able to express herself in an interior space without being silenced. In earlier scenes, particularly the scene when she entered her father’s study to announce her decision to become an artist, Avis becomes tongue-tied and incapable of articulating her herself. In these two bedroom scenes, however, Avis plainly states her disappointment and frustration with Philip. Thus, in the relative

safety of her bedroom, which she has carefully decorated to mirror the outdoor locations that she finds empowering, Avis is able to voice her anger, to articulate her disappointment, and to admit her own mistakes. Additionally she draws strength from her room much as she once found strength in the earth. While she barely lifted her head from the earth to tell Philip there was no point in continuing their discussion of marriage, she does not even lift her head from her pillow to tell Philip, “It is a waste of strength for us to talk. We do not understand each other” (*Avis* 195).

For the first time in her marriage, Avis seems to understand the truth of this statement. They have fundamentally misunderstood each other. Even though Avis clearly outlined her expectations of marriage—expectations that Philip willingly agreed to live up to—before accepting Philip’s proposal, their marriage has not been the equal partnership that Avis envisioned and Philip agreed to. Avis has taken on the bulk of the household responsibilities and child-rearing, while Philip has single-mindedly devoted himself to his career.⁴⁹ In turn, Avis has had to sacrifice her career to focus on her family. While she makes it clear that Philip’s mistakes have damaged his relationship with his wife, Phelps does not absolve Avis; she sees Avis as equally responsible for the failures in her marriage and her life as her husband. For her part, Avis realizes she compromised herself when she married Philip. She allowed herself to be swayed by Philip’s statements about unconditional love and marital equality. But now that they are married and have two children, Avis also realizes she has little choice but to accept her mistakes and make the most of the situation in which she finds herself. Drawing strength from, her bedroom, the one space that is truly her own at this point in the novel, Avis silently determines to make the best of her life and, as her own mother did, devotes herself to her children. At this point, the novel demonstrates a clear shift in Avis, as her perspective on marriage, motherhood, and art change dramatically.

With her realization that Philip does not love her the way she believed he did, Avis ceases to be the “hearth-loving” creature she unwillingly became when she married Philip and takes charge of her life once again (*Avis* 49). In the fall, Philip resigns his position at Harmouth, “on account of an increasing delicacy of the lungs, in consequence of which his physicians had forbidden all brain labor, and required a change of climate” (198). With Philip increasingly unable to manage his own affairs or even to provide for his family, Avis has little choice but to assume most of the responsibility for caring for her family: “She planned, she hoped, she commanded, she contrived” (199). Avis is the one to decide that Philip must go to Europe for his health, just as she is the one who finds the money to pay for the trip; in fact, Avis makes Van’s shoes herself so that there is enough money for Philip’s trip. As Avis finds ways to provide for her family, Philip becomes increasingly cold and cruel toward her. Rather than express any appreciation for her work, Philip regards “her with cool, distant eyes” (200). He is seemingly “Unconscious of cruelty as the burnt-out crater is of the snow that has sifted down its sides. It was his temperament, he reasoned, to express himself as he felt, and he certainly did not feel to his wife as he did when they first married” (200). Whereas Avis accepts responsibility for her mistakes and tries to make the best of their situation, Philip finds no fault with his actions or his choices. In fact, he seems to blame Avis for the inconstancy of his feelings, and he pities himself, believing “that he bore the heavier end of their mutual sorrow” (200). It comes as no surprise to the reader, then, that Avis experiences an overwhelming sense of relief when Philip finally leaves for Europe. No longer burdened with Philip’s extreme neediness or his constant reminders that he can never love her as he once did, Avis believes that she will be able to focus on her children and her art in his absence. With her renewed commitment to her art and her devotion to her children, Avis also renews her relationship with nature, spending more time

outdoors than she has since marrying Philip. Avis learns, however, that her view of nature has changed as she comes to understand that nature can be both comforting and cruel.

In Philip's absence, Avis turns her children outdoors, both so they can explore the same fields and beaches that she did as a child and so she can have time to paint. Avis soon finds that she no longer assumes the outdoors is a sheltered and welcoming place; rather, she now recognizes the many dangers present, and she continually cautions Van, who, like Avis, is prone to recklessness. Her cautions do not prevent Van, who is only three, from taking a fall "swim in the hogshead" (*Avis* 206). As a result of his swim, Van falls ill and develops pneumonia. After a two-week illness, Van dies. The night of his funeral, Avis finds nature, specifically the sound of the ocean, which has always been a comfort to her, disquieting:

Avis was almost sorry that night that they had lain him so near the sea;
for the sea was high too, like the wind, and thundered heavily, even here,
sharp through the sheltered house. He had always been a wakeful baby,
quick to start and shiver in his naps. She could not rid herself of the
feeling that the noise would disturb him. The imperious mother's habit of
three years and a half of nervous care lay strong upon her. She could
have dashed out and hushed the voice of the almighty deep, lest it
should wake the child. (208)

This passage marks the first time Avis has experienced any unease with any part of nature. At every other point in the novel, Avis has found comfort in the roaring sea, and, on at least one occasion, she fearlessly walked Harmouth's beaches as a winter storm approached. After Van's death, however, Avis sees nature as potentially dangerous, and she finds refuge in interior spaces, preferring "the sheltered house" to the wild outdoors for the first time in her life (208). Avis's sudden ability to take comfort in the indoors is significant primarily for two reasons. It

indicates that her emotions are on the verge of overwhelming her. The outdoors has always been the location in which Avis is most comfortable expressing herself and analyzing her emotions. In the wake of Van's death, Avis struggles to contain her emotions, and taking refuge in interior locations seems to prevent her grief from overtaking her. Further, it emphasizes the new way she has come to view herself—as a mother first and as an artist second. Avis only sees nature as dangerous when it poses a threat to her children.

Despite her revised view of nature, Avis once again reconnects with nature in the novel's final chapters. That Avis is able to return to nature following her initial distrust of the natural world following Van's death emphasizes her intense need to be in the outdoors. Here, nature serves to strengthen Avis, as it has done previously in the novel, and being outdoors gives her the space in which to consider both her past and her future: "Her thought stepped out like a disembodied spirit, and took a survey of herself" (*Avis* 217). Through her reconnection with nature, Avis comes to terms with the path she has chosen. She accepts her roles as wife and mother, just as she accepts that she will never be the successful painter she once dreamed of being. But her return to nature also helps Avis come to terms with the outcome of her life. Surrounded by nature, as she is in the final chapters, Avis is able to mourn the loss of her dream and the loss of herself. In fact, she gives into this grief at least twice during her and Philip's trip to Florida, and both times, her grief overwhelms her after they have spent the day outdoors. Her time on the beaches of Florida, which are as interstitial as Harmouth's beaches, enables Avis to experience the emotions she has denied for so long. She is able to express "All the repressed suffering of a woman to whom it has been given to carry her husband's nature, as she lifted that of her children, through a lonely and laborious married life, seemed to come sweeping over her, wave upon wave, in a tide to which she could see no end" (232). Thus, Avis stops denying that the one person she misses as much as Van is herself, and she begins to mourn that loss. That

Avis must return to nature to understand and accept that she had forsaken herself reminds readers that, even some four years into her marriage, she still prefers the interstitial spaces of the natural world to the private spaces of the home. Her fear of nature following Van's death quickly abates, and she once again finds it restorative and freeing. For Phelps, women need spaces in which they can express themselves, and she argues, through Avis, that it is easier for women who feel unfulfilled to accept and perhaps even to change the circumstances of their lives if they have access to interstitial spaces.

Immediately following Van's funeral, Philip unexpectedly returns home, completely unaware that the boy had ever been ill. Avis finds telling Philip the most painful part of Van's death. She seems to believe that Van is not really gone so long as Philip believes him to still be a happy, healthy little boy. As Avis struggles to cope with her grief, she allows Philip, who is still in poor health, to take Van's place in her life: "She devoted herself to his invalid wants with the infinite tenderness as natural to her as her sweet and even breath" (*Avis* 213). Avis mothers Philip as much as she mothered Van. Avis also continues to be the decision maker in the family, and she decides that she and Philip will winter in Florida to allow Philip to avoid a harsh Harmouth winter in his weakened state. While the trip, which enables them to spend more time outdoors together than they have in their entire marriage, is ostensibly for Philip's health, it also grants Avis time and space to heal, both from the sorrow of Van's death and the hardships of her marriage. As she has throughout her life, Avis turns to nature to gain strength and to put her mind at ease.

The outdoors once again prove to be restorative for Avis, and as she travels south, she strives to change her perspective:

It was to Avis one of those subtle experiences whose suave surprise
lends a new outlook to the possible evolution of character from the

probable novel of scenery in life which is to follow this, when, from the narrow windows of the cars she overtook the widening of the infinite Southern heavens, day by day. (*Avis* 216)

Gradually, heartened by “the influence of atmosphere,” Avis is able to think of Van without weeping and to look at Philip without being overwhelmed by regret (216). Indeed, their time in Florida even changes Philip, who grows increasingly kind and affectionate toward Avis as his health improves.

In fact, being outdoors grants Philip the time and the space to consider his mistakes, and for the first time in their marriage, Philip acknowledges that he failed to keep his promises of equality to Avis: “It’s a pretty hard thing, after all, when a man and a woman have actually married, not to let things go like the rest of the world . . . But perhaps, if I had helped you more—cared and planned—I don’t see how it all came about. We didn’t mean it to be so when we married, did, we Avis?” (222). Recognizing the damage his actions have caused his wife, Philip apologizes the best he can. That he offers this apology while they sit on the upper-deck of a boat as they travel to St. Augustine adds to its significance. Here, Philip and Avis occupy a space that does not specifically belong to either of them. In the open air, Philip is neither threatened by a space that Avis controls, nor is he compelled to remind her they are in one he controls. They are free from all spatial markers—the bench on the boat’s deck is neither masculine nor feminine, neither public nor private. Its interstitial nature enables Philip to speak of his own mistakes in much the same way the interstitiality of the outdoors enabled Avis to express her views of marriage earlier in the novel. With this scene, Phelps reminds her readers that both men and women can fall victim to the spaces they occupy. As Avis allowed herself to be silenced by the domestic environment of their home, Philip fell into the stereotypical role of demanding husband. Both failed to keep the promises they made to the other, and, removed

from the confines of interior spaces, Philip is both able to realize and to apologize for his mistakes. In an outdoor setting very similar to the one in which they fell in love, Philip and Avis are able to forgive one another and begin to renew their love. It is ironic, then, that in Florida's healing environment nature once again becomes cruel, and Philip dies after spending a night alone in a Florida swamp.

Philip's death comes as a complete shock to both Avis and the reader. Indeed, Phelps structures this section of the novel in such a way that the reader anticipates that Avis and Philip will return to Harmouth and make another attempt at an equal marriage, one in which neither person's career is privileged over the other's. The tentative plans they have made for their return to Harmouth support this expectation: "it was a comfort to know, that . . . they could return, and start the sanitarium or the boarding-school. It would be quite practicable to find a suitable housekeeper: Avis should not be exhausted by that" (*Avis* 234). By having Philip die in Florida, Phelps suggest that the changes in Philip and in their marriage cannot be maintained if they had returned to Harmouth, where they will likely fall back into their traditional roles. In their home, ensconced in his study, Philip will likely once again leave all the domestic duties to Avis and resent her for her inability to accomplish them to his satisfaction. Avis, for her part, will soon be unable to paint and will continue to allow herself to be silenced by Philip, their home, and her domestic duties. In an environment where Philip would be unable to escape his many shortcomings as a husband and a father and where Avis would be unable to forsake her responsibilities to her husband and her daughter to nurture her love of art and nature, they would lapse into old habits. Further, they would restrict themselves to their designated spaces, and their marriage would be as tumultuous as it was before Philip left for Europe. Philip's death, then, preserves their relationship in a moment of relative happiness, as well as ensuring that Avis is able to maintain control over her own life and her home.

Immediately following Philip's death, Avis returns to Harmouth and to her daughter, Wait. Rather than go back to the home she shared with Philip, however, Avis and Wait move in with Avis's father and Aunt Chloe. Mourning both Van and Philip, Avis reclaims her "garden-studio while the apples budded, and there she staid patiently for a year" (*Avis* 243). The interstitial nature of the studio allows Avis to continue contemplating her past and her future without having to endure questions from anyone. As it did when she and Philip argued about marriage, the studio offers Avis protection and comfort. It protects her from the prying, but concerned, questions of her friends and family, and it comforts her because it allows her to consider if she can combine her dream of becoming an artist with her desire to be a good mother to Wait. At the end of the year, Avis leaves the studio and announces her plans to her father: "Next week, father, I shall go into the Art School, and teach, and I think I can get a private class besides" (243). Thus, Avis accepts that no space, not even the interstitial spaces she has found so empowering, can protect her from the truth: she sacrificed her talent when she chose to marry Philip. She "does not become the embodiment of the independent woman by the end of the novel" (Coffey 181), not even with access to interstitial spaces. As Phelps suggests, Avis has chosen poorly. She allowed Philip to convince her that she could combine both marriage and career and that she did not need interstitial spaces to survive. Further, Avis has ignored her own needs and wants because she fell in love. Avis has, however, learned from her mistakes and determines that "My child shall not repeat my blunders" (*Avis* 245). Wait, who resembles her mother in appearance and temperament, is a precocious and imaginative little girl, and Avis "turn[s] her outdoors," giving her the freedom to romp and play that she was often denied. Wait develops Avis's love for nature and, "Before she could read a line, Avis's daughter was a splendid little animal" (245). Avis gives Wait unfettered access to interstitial spaces, but it seems clear that she hopes Wait will be able to succeed beyond the scope of such spaces. Wait

then represents the future, a time when women will not have to rely on interstitial spaces for empowerment, but she, as Phelps suggests through her name, must wait for such a time to come.

With *The Story of Avis*, Phelps not only questions the relevance of marriage for women with creative ambitions, but she also questions the spatial limitations placed on such women, arguing that these limitations stifle women almost as much as marriage. With Avis's command of interstitial spaces, including the outdoors, Phelps suggests that in the right environment women can overcome societal convention and choose their own paths in life, but they can only succeed when they don't forsake themselves, their dreams, and their need for interstitial spaces.

3. “LIKE ONE WHO FEELS THE STIRRING OF FREE AND INDEPENDENT
THOUGHTS”: NARRATIVE AND INTERSTITIAL SPACES IN
HARRIET E. WILSON’S *OUR NIG* AND HARRIET JACOBS’S
INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL

A small shed had been added to my grandmother’s house years ago. Some boards were laid across the joists at the top, and between these boards and the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by anything but rats and mice. It had a pent roof, covered with nothing but shingles. . . The garret was only nine feet long and seven feet wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air. . . To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered [my grandmother’s] house. The air was stifling; the darkness total.

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

It was not yet quite dark, so [Jack and Frado] ascended the stairs without any light, passing through nicely furnished rooms, which were a source of great amazement to the child. He opened the door which connected with [Frado’s] room by a dark, unfinished passageway. “Don’t bump your head,” said Jack, and stepped before to open the door leading into her apartment,—an unfinished chamber over the kitchen, the roof slanting nearly to the floor, so that the bed could only stand in the middle of the room. A small half window furnished light and air.

Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig, or; Sketches in the Life of a Free Black*

In the above passage from her 1861 slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs describes the garret space that she lived in for seven years before finally fleeing the South and permanently escaping slavery. Using strikingly similar language, Harriet E. Wilson describes the room that she lived in for approximately twelve years while she was an indentured servant in her 1859 fictionalized autobiography⁵⁰ *Our Nig, or; Sketches of the Life of a Free Black*.⁵¹ Both women highlight the interstitiality of their living spaces.

After introducing the garret with this brief description, Jacobs goes on to describe the space as her “loophole of retreat,” her “place of concealment,” “my den,” and “my cell”

throughout the narrative (91, 92, 111, 114). While each of these terms highlights the ostensible purpose of the garret, particularly the “loophole of retreat” and “place of concealment,” They also position the garret as an interstitial space. Thus, the garret exists as a border space, transgressing the limits of the various public and private spaces that Jacobs considers in her narrative. The garret can be seen as an interstitial space because it is neither an extension of the shed, nor it is a fully formed attic space. It is neither an outdoor space, as it is not part of the adjoining porch, nor it is an interior location, as it adds no useable space to her grandmother’s house. It is not even a functional storage space because it lacks insulation from both the winter cold and the summer heat. It is a space that is, simply put, not fit for human habitation. Indeed, as Jacobs describes it, the garret occupies the least desirable location in her grandmother’s house, and thus, no one, initially not even Jacobs herself, sees its value as an interstitial space.

The very interstitiality of the garret, the fact that it cannot be classified as either a public or a private space (after all, it fulfills none of the functions typically assigned to either type of space), renders it highly valuable to Jacobs and her family when Jacobs finally decides to escape slavery. Because Jacobs deems it impossible safely to leave the North Carolina community in which she lives without being caught by her master, whom she calls Dr. Flint in the narrative, she and her family settle on the garret as a hiding place. As the garret does not exist—indeed, it physically cannot exist because so far as the casual observer is concerned, Jacobs, so long as she occupies the garret, does not exist either. In fact, as far as Dr. Flint and the entire community is concerned, Jacobs has fled North Carolina. By choosing to live in the garret rather than escaping to the North, Jacobs embarks on an interstitial life, in which, much like the garret itself, she is neither one thing nor another—she is neither free nor enslaved, neither able to mother her children nor refrain from involving herself in their lives, neither subject to the tyranny of her master nor free from his threats. She is, however, in more control of her body and her life than

she has ever been before. Jacobs claims the garret and the power of its interstitiality as her own, transforming it into a site of resistance. In the relative safety of the garret, Jacobs is able to manipulate her master and eventually free herself and her two children. Thus, by using the interstitial nature of the garret to her advantage, Jacobs empowers herself and changes the outcome of her life.

Like Jacobs, Wilson's Frado occupies a space that is of no use to the Bellmont family, for whom she works as an indentured servant, and that is interstitial. As the above quoted passage from *Our Nig* indicates, its unfinished nature keeps it from being fully integrated into the rest of the house. The presence of the half-window, however, suggests it had been intended for a definite purpose at one time. Its distance from the family's private rooms serves to emphasize that Frado is not a member of the Bellmont family, yet its proximity to the kitchen means that Frado can be commanded to that particular private space at a moment's notice. The room's in-between location mirrors Frado's own status within the household. She is neither enslaved nor free; she is neither a member of the Bellmont family nor is she able to survive without them (nor they without her). Despite her somewhat uncertain status in the family, which is complicated by her position as a young mulatta, Frado is granted exclusive access to the L-chamber,⁵² and the Bellmonts respect this space as hers, rarely—if ever—entering it.

Although Frado never depicts it as such, it seems that this is the only interior space described in the narrative in which Frado is able to find any comfort or solace. She may not be able to use the interstitial nature of her bedroom to actively resist her oppressors as Jacobs is able to do in her garret, but Frado does, we must assume, use the L-chamber to gather the physical and mental strength she needs to survive life with the Bellmonts, to challenge Mrs. Bellmont, and ultimately to change her life. Given its proximity to the kitchen and the reality that Frado can be called away from the L-chamber at any time of day or night, she is unable to make full use of

the interstitiality of the space as a location to claim power over herself. While Jacobs is relatively safe in her garret and, thus, can use it as her primary site of resistance, Frado must seek out other interstitial spaces in which to resist and challenge her mistress. Frado locates such spaces away from the interior of the Bellmont home and away from any architectural spaces that Mrs. Bellmont controls. Despite the differences in the way these two women find, adapt, and create physical interstitial spaces, the authors tell strikingly similar tales of physical hardship, emotional abuse, and pain. Both women also express a desire to have a home—or even a room—of their own, where they can care for and educate their children and live on their own terms. Although neither Jacobs nor Wilson is able to fulfill this desire by the conclusion of their respective texts, each is successful in carving out a narrative space, or home, for herself.

In this section, I examine the development of narrative, interstitial spaces in the works of Jacobs and Wilson, arguing that these two women envisioned their narratives as interstitial spaces where they could share their life stories in an attempt to claim their own subjectivity, to express their own voices, to parent their own children, and to control their own bodies, both their corporeal bodies and the labors of their bodies. Relying upon the critical assumption that African American women, women of color in general, and white working class women were routinely excluded from the nineteenth-century ideologies of domesticity, femininity, and womanhood,⁵³ I contend that women who had been denied access to homes of their own and even denied the relative safety of traditional feminine spaces often wrote as a way to claim spaces of their own. The acts of writing and publishing fictionalized accounts of their lives⁵⁴ places Jacobs and Wilson, as well as women writers with similar life experiences, in interstitial spaces as they position themselves as rightful members of the private sphere while simultaneously publicly critiquing the racist and classist views that kept them from being recognized as such. Jacobs's and Wilson's texts can be seen as interstitial spaces because they

use their texts to enter a public forum where each can discuss private matters as they attempt to claim literal and metaphoric spaces of their own where they can openly express their feelings on slavery and servitude, racism, motherhood, freedom, and home. As I analyze their individual narratives as examples of metaphoric interstitial spaces, I also examine the various architectural spaces that each woman—and their pseudonymous counterparts—makes use of in their texts. Their focus on architectural spaces reinforces and is reinforced by the interstitiality of their narratives.

The moment they chose to write their books, both Wilson and Jacobs made conscious decisions to enter interstitial spaces. Neither woman was in a position to tell her life story without altering some facts. Indeed, both women had much to fear if their true identities were revealed: Wilson feared the repercussions of the living members of the Hayward family, the family who had kept her as an indentured servant for most of her life,⁵⁵ and Jacobs feared for her relatives still living in slavery. Thus, their very decisions to make their life stories public, while simultaneously keeping many of the details of their experiences private, places them and their texts in interstitial spaces. To effectively explain this statement, it is necessary to briefly discuss how each text is categorized in terms of genre.

Largely ignored when it was originally published, Wilson's *Our Nig* seems to have defied classification until Henry Louis Gates, Jr. rediscovered the text in the early 1980s. After conducting extensive archival research to authenticate the text, Gates concluded the book was an autobiographical novel, written and published by a woman named Harriet Wilson, who had been an indentured servant in Milford, New Hampshire between 1830 or 1833 and 1843 or 1846 (Foreman and Pitts vii-viii). As P. Gabrielle Foreman asserts in "Recovered Autobiographies and the Marketplace: *Our Nig*'s Generic Genealogies and Harriet Wilson's Entrepreneurial Enterprise," Gates's decision to label *Our Nig* was primarily a strategic one:

Savvy about the juncture where the politics of recovery intersect with the cultural marketplace of race and letters, Gates situated *Our Nig* in relation to other literary genres to claim its status as a *first*, the *first* black novel to be published in the United States, the *first* novel to be published by a black woman in any language. (Foreman 124)⁵⁶

By identifying *Our Nig* as the first novel written by a black woman, Gates effectively guaranteed it and Wilson a place in the literary canon and ensured it would receive the critical attention that had eluded it for more than a century. But Gates's categorization of the text led many scholars to doubt the authenticity of Wilson's story, and although *Our Nig* received a great deal of scholarly attention following its 1982 publication, it was initially marginalized as merely a novel, seen as little more than a fictional tale of a young indentured servant. Scholars questioned Wilson's motive for writing, her purpose, and even her existence (White 22). As a direct result of Gates's labeling *Our Nig* a novel, however, critics and historians—Foreman, White, Reginald Pitts, R.J. Ellis, and Gates himself among them—have completed extensive archival research, proving not only that the claims Wilson makes in her preface are true, but also verifying the facts of Wilson's life and determining the true identities of the members of the Bellmont family. As White emphasizes in her influential essay "'Our Nig' and the She-Devil: New Information about Harriet Wilson and the 'Bellmont' Family," the lives of the actual Bellmonts and Wilson "correspond so closely to the narrative" that we must remember that Gates "not Harriet Wilson, classified *Our Nig* as fiction; Wilson simply titles her work 'Sketches from the Life of a free Black' and refers to her 'narration,' while the author of the longest testimonial at the [narrative's] end calls the book 'an Autobiography'" (23).

Following White's 1993 essay, critics began reevaluating Wilson's work, examining it almost exclusively in terms of genre. *Our Nig* had already captured critics' and historians'

imaginations for its unique story. It is, as Foreman and Pitts contend in their “Introduction” to the text’s 2005 edition,

the only extant narrative written by a black indentured servant in the antebellum North. Besides being one of the rare sketches that tells us what it is like to be a poor northern-born free woman, *Our Nig* is one of the very few narratives to be written by a free northern-born black at all. (xxiv)

The very circumstances of Wilson’s life forced her to draw on multiple genres while writing—she was a bi-racial woman, the product of an interracial marriage, who was born free; abandoned as a child by her white mother following her father’s death, she was forced to become a servant in order to survive; and the family she worked for were prominent members of New England with strong ties to the anti-slavery movement. Scholars, including White, Ellis, Foreman, and Julia Stern, have variously categorized Wilson’s text as a slave narrative, a captivity narrative, a conversion narrative, a seduction novel, “a laboring class novel” (Ellis 6), a sentimental novel, and an autobiography. In fact, Wilson seems to draw consciously on each of these genres throughout the text. At one moment she relies upon the conventions of the captivity narrative to claim that she and other free blacks living in the United States were “unjustly enslaved under existing laws” and “that [African Americans] are free individuals who have been unjustly held captive by the illegal subversion of those laws” (Foreman and Pitts xxxiii). *Our Nig* morphs these conventions with those of the seduction novel, particularly through Frado’s mother Mag, Frado herself, and, ostensibly, Wilson (xxxi). Despite the numerous attempts by critics to do so, *Our Nig* still cannot be definitively categorized. Indeed, while I agree that the narrative⁵⁷ is most easily categorized as a fictionalized autobiography, *Our Nig* is, in the words of critic Julia Stern, something of “a hybrid literary form” (439).

As Wilson's narrative was long ignored by scholars and critics, so too was Jacobs's slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Unlike *Our Nig*, *Incidents* reached a moderate audience after its initial publication, and "Jacobs had achieved some celebrity" as its author (Yellin xx). It was only after the Civil War and Reconstruction that the narrative and its author were largely forgotten, long-time Jacobs scholar Jean Fagan Yellin insists (xx). In 1973, a new edition of *Incidents* was published, and for several years scholars debated "the validity of its authorship and its authenticity as a slave narrative" (McKay and Foster xiii). In fact, most scholars believed *Incidents* was a fictionalized slave narrative written by Lydia Maria Child, a prominent white, anti-slavery and feminist author of the nineteenth century, who had edited the narrative and penned its introduction. When she initially encountered Jacobs's slave narrative as a graduate student, Yellin believed it to be genuine, and just as Gates did with *Our Nig*, she authenticated the narrative and Jacobs herself through painstaking archival research (Yellin xii). Yellin's work has not only validated the circumstances of Jacobs's life and her text; it has also all but ensured that *Incidents* will forever be categorized as a slave narrative. Thus, it has not been subjected to the extensive analysis to determine its genre as *Our Nig* has.

Despite its unquestioned status as a slave narrative, *Incidents* can still be seen, much like *Our Nig*, as a "hybrid" text (Stern 439). *Incidents* differs in several ways from slave narratives written by men, most notably from Frederick Douglass's 1848 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. As Maurice Wallace has noted, Douglass's narrative, as well as many others written by other formerly enslaved men, is marked by his individual journey to freedom (240). Separated from his family as a young child, Douglass must face the numerous challenges of slavery alone, and when he finally stands up to his brutal slave master Mr. Covey, he can do so without fearing that his actions will affect anyone else. Similarly, when he decides to escape to the North, he need only plan for himself.⁵⁸ Whereas Douglass consistently identifies himself as

an individual man, Jacobs “identifies herself primarily in relation to her family” (Sorsio 6). Unlike Douglass (or even Wilson), Jacobs was able to maintain close ties with many of her family members; in fact, Jacobs knew both her mother and her father, was reared alongside her brother and her uncles, and lived most of her adult life in her maternal grandmother’s home. But, rather than making her time in slavery or her journey to freedom easier, Jacobs’s close familial relationships actually make both more difficult on many levels. While her “family functions as a sources of strength” for her, it also serves as “a substantial roadblock” to freedom (6). Thus, Jacobs shapes her narrative very differently from Douglass and other men writing slave narratives at this time. Rather than relying upon a straightforward, linear narrative, Jacobs, like Wilson, draws upon multiple literary genres to highlight the challenges she faced as an enslaved woman. *Incidents*, therefore, incorporates elements of the sentimental and seduction novels, along with those of the slave narrative. Although *Incidents* is, perhaps, not as clearly a hybrid form as *Our Nig*, it is still most powerful when considered as such because it allows us to examine the various genres and motives Jacobs relied upon to tell her story.

Through her conscious manipulation of genres and her obvious concern with public and private spaces as well as the public and private roles allotted enslaved women, Jacobs, as Wilson did approximately two years earlier, creates a narrative space that enables her to argue against slavery generally and more specifically to challenge nineteenth-century domestic ideologies that did not include enslaved women. Jacobs is able to negotiate the boundaries between the public and private realms as she shares her very private story in an attempt to change public perception of African American women in general and enslaved women in particular. Jacobs clearly argues that all women, regardless of race, class, or ethnicity, should be guaranteed the same protections mandated by domestic ideology, but she also questions the double standards that marginalized women face. Through her narrative’s hybrid form, her rhetorical structure, and the intimate

connection she forges with her audience, Jacobs transforms her narrative into an interstitial space—her text, then, becomes a physical and metaphoric location in which she can examine her public and private roles and where she can simultaneously critique and position herself as a member of the “cult of true womanhood” (Welter 44).

Defining *Our Nig* as a “hybrid text,” as Stern does, is certainly appropriate, and this term can be applied to *Incidents*, as I have done. I, however, want to extend Stern’s definition. Through their intentional morphing of fact and fiction and their strategic manipulation of public and private, *Our Nig* and *Incidents* become interstitial narratives, and as such they transgress the boundaries of each of the genres Wilson and Jacobs’s employs. By creating interstitial texts, Wilson and Jacobs succeed in examining and challenging the social ambiguities and domestic ideologies that antebellum black women, whether free or enslaved, living in the North or the South, faced on a daily basis. Through their analyses and creation of interstitial spaces, both in their texts and their texts as such spaces, Wilson and Jacobs suggest that black women can only claim power and tell their stories on their own terms by transgressing the boundaries of public and private spaces and finding or creating interstitial spaces.

Each author also questions nineteenth-century domestic ideology. As I quoted in the Introduction, nineteenth-century domestic ideologies were necessarily political. As historian Barbara Welter first noted in 1966, the “cult of true womanhood” expected women to be models of virtue, piety, submissiveness, and piety (44). True women, as Welter so named nineteenth-century American women who upheld these ideals, wielded their power from the confines of the domestic sphere, as they influenced their husbands, sons, and, thus, the public sphere as a whole through their ideal behavior. Many domestic ideologues, including Catharine Beecher and her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, both of whom enjoyed long literary careers, advocated that women should be content with their domestic roles and should work to be the best wives, mothers, and

daughters they could be as they wielded considerable influence over their husbands, sons, and fathers. In fact, Beecher and Stowe claimed that American women “have an equal interest in all social and civil concerns; and that no domestic, civil, or political institution, is right, that sacrifices her interest to promote that of the other sex” (*AMH* 4). Beecher further believed that it is

in America, alone, that women are raised to an equality with the other sex; and that, both in theory and practice, their interests are regarded of equal value. They are made subordinate to station, only where a regard to their best interests demand it, while, as if in compensation for this, by custom and courtesy, they are always treated as superiors. Universally, in this Country, through every class of society, precedence is given to woman, in all the comforts, conveniences, and courtesies, of life. (*Treatise* 9)

As the superior sex, then, women must commit themselves to “the exalted privilege of extending over the world [their] blessed influences” (13).

Beecher’s view of American womanhood, however, is predicated on several faulty assumptions. First, as numerous critics have pointed out,⁵⁹ and as Beecher’s own life history reinforces,⁶⁰ the public and private spheres were not as neatly divided as Beecher suggests. Further, Beecher’s language indicates that the privileges she describes were extended to *all* American women. At no point in her widely read *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* does Beecher recognize that the privileges she claims exist for women do not exist for African American women, Native American women, immigrant women, or working class women. The precepts of domesticity, as outlined by Beecher, and the belief in women’s influence upon society necessarily excluded women who were neither white nor members of the upper or middle classes, as their race and class made it virtually impossible for them to live their lives exclusively

within the confines of the private sphere.⁶¹ While virtually all nineteenth-century arbiters of true womanhood excluded African American women from their discussions of domesticity, at least one well-known advocate of true womanhood publicly acknowledged that the very ideologies that she believed in, wrote about, and financially profited from did not include African American women.

Like Catharine Beecher, Lydia Maria Child argued that women should exercise their “power through indirect influence rather than direct force” (Romero 15). Indeed, in *The American Frugal Housewife* (1829) and *The Mother’s Book* (1831), Child argues, as Lora Romero reminds us, that “it is better for mothers to instruct through virtuous behavior rather than precept” (16). In spite of her immense success as a novelist and an author of women’s conduct manuals, Child strove to follow the tenets of domesticity that she advocated in her books, at least early in her career. Biographer Carolyn L. Karcher points out that other than the limited political statements she asserted in her 1824 novel *Hobomok; or, A Tale of Early Times*⁶² Child refrained from commenting publicly on political events (FW 100). Instead she focused on writing conduct manuals and publishing the *Juvenile Miscellany*, a literary annual for children.

Less than two years after publishing *The Mother’s Book*, however, Child contradicted her beliefs that women should not publicly voice their political views with the publication of *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*. Child’s 1833 treatise “provided the abolitionist movement with its first full-scale analysis of the slavery question” (Karcher, “Introduction” xxxiii). In fact, *An Appeal*, which includes eight chapters on topics such as the international history of slavery, colonization societies, and slavery’s economic implications, is so comprehensive “that no other anti-slavery writer ever attempted to duplicate Child’s achievement” (xxxii). By publishing *An Appeal*, Child knowingly violates the predominant norms of nineteenth-century feminine discourse by publicly engaging in a “political

controversy” (xxxv). But in violating beliefs she previously advocated, Child also expresses what Karcher describes as “a woman’s perspective on slavery” (xxxv). Child examines the negative effects slavery has on both enslaved women and their mistresses, something few other antislavery writers had done at this point in the antislavery movement. Child specifically points out the many ways slavery victimizes African American women, and she openly mocks “the domestic ideology glorifying ‘true womanhood’” (xxxv). In fact, Child argues that

The negro woman is unprotected either by law or public opinion. She is the property of her master, and her daughters are his property. They are allowed to have no conscientious scruples, no sense of shame, no regard for the feelings of husband, or parent; they must be entirely subservient to the will of their owner, on pain of being whipped as near unto death as will comport his interest, or quite to death, if it suit his pleasure. (Child 22)

With this statement, Child questions the relevance of the very domestic ideology she once openly supported. If enslaved women have no rights to the protections of domesticity, “no right to preserve the sexual purity deemed essential to true womanhood,” Child argues that the ideology is without purpose (Karcher xxxvi). Further, if one woman, regardless of color, is forced to compromise her womanhood, all women are at risk. With *An Appeal*, Child is able, among other things, to challenge the racial limitations of nineteenth-century domestic ideology, especially as those limitations affect African American women.⁶³

Because she had no first hand experience with slavery, Child’s argument, although effective, is purely rhetorical. Aside from a few second and third-hand accounts of women’s experiences in slavery, Child cannot specifically examine the effects of true womanhood on African American women. Child does, however, establish a paradigm of critique that many

African American women writers build on. In fact, both Wilson and Jacobs seemingly extend Child's argument against excluding African American women from the various—and severely limited—protections of domesticity and its definition of womanhood as a given. Relying on their first hand experiences as victims of true womanhood, Wilson and Jacobs openly critique the codes of domesticity that kept them and other marginalized women in subordinate positions. As Hazel Carby notes, Wilson and Jacobs use their texts “to confront the dominant domestic ideologies and literary conventions of true womanhood which excluded them from the definitions of ‘woman’” (6). In order to confront these ideologies, however, Wilson and Jacobs, along with most other African American women writing in the nineteenth century, had to acknowledge the extent to which the very ideologies that excluded them had influenced their view of womanhood. Narratives written by black women often “embody the tension between the author's desire to privilege her experience and being able to speak only within a discourse of conventionally held beliefs about the nature of black womanhood” (22). Thus, black women writers, including Wilson and Jacobs, had to write within a discourse that typically marked them as less sensitive and as morally and spiritually inferior to white women. The very fact that they had to acknowledge both the dominant discourse of American womanhood while revising it through their respective narratives places Wilson and Jacobs in an interstitial space of sorts. They each use this interstitial space to their advantage as it enables them to use the parts of American womanhood they find valuable and to discard the aspects that do not apply to them. In writing their stories and in examining the specific spaces they were limited to, Wilson and Jacobs attempt to develop a discourse of black womanhood that is not wholly dependent upon the ideology of true womanhood.⁶⁴ Thus, they use the interstitial space to which the prevailing discourse of American womanhood has limited them to produce a version of womanhood that did include them and, by extension, all other African American women. For her part, Jacobs,

through her direct appeals for her audience's sympathy, more tacitly questions these moral codes, arguing that domesticity, although valuable, victimizes all African American women. Perhaps because of her position as a free-born black woman, Wilson is able to confront these ideologies more openly, by directly challenging her mistress and the very codes that kept her marginalized.

3.1 Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*

In *Our Nig*, Harriet E. Wilson tells the story of Alfrado. Frado, as everyone calls her, is a young mulatta who becomes an orphan when her white mother abandons her, following the death of her black father.⁶⁵ Left on the doorstep of the wealthy Bellmont family's home, the six-year-old Frado stays with the Bellmonts because she has nowhere else to go. When it becomes clear that Frado's mother Mag is not returning, the Bellmonts decide to keep Frado because they have difficulty employing a hired girl for any length of time. She is given a small room, "an unfinished chamber over the kitchen," and put to work immediately (Wilson 17). At no point does any member of the Bellmont family ask Frado if she wants to live with or work for them; Frado is effectively silenced the moment her mother leaves her on the Bellmonts' doorstep. Frado's acceptance into the Bellmont household marks her entry into the world of unpaid servitude.⁶⁶ For the next twelve years or so, Frado lives with the Bellmonts as their servant. In reality, she is treated as a slave: she is forced to work long hours with little food or sleep, and she is frequently beaten for any behavior that Mrs. Bellmont deems lazy, disrespectful, or otherwise inappropriate. Frado survives to adulthood, but she is physically and emotionally scarred by life with the Bellmonts. As an adult, she is often too ill to work and frequently has to rely upon the kindness of strangers to support her and her son.

This brief summary reveals much about Frado's interstitial existence. Neither black nor white, neither enslaved nor free, Frado spends her entire life negotiating in-between spaces, both

architectural and metaphorical. Through negotiating and even transcending the spaces she is limited to, almost all of which are classified as private, domestic, or feminine, Frado challenges the boundaries of these spaces, which include the Bellmont kitchen, dining room, the barn, and sitting room, into sites of resistance. In the same spaces that limit and even enslave her, Frado manipulates the private sphere to her advantage, changing these locations into interstitial spaces that are neither wholly private nor wholly public and that, as such, can be easily adapted to other purposes. The flexible nature of these spaces enables Frado to transgress the boundaries of the public and private realms to defend herself against the physical, mental, and emotional abuse Mrs. Bellmont inflicts upon her. Frado actively resists the limitations of domesticity and, ultimately, succeeds in freeing herself and claiming ownership over herself and her voice. Through her use of Frado, Wilson alters the narrative space of her text into an interstitial space and similarly transforms her narrative into a site of resistance, which ultimately enables her to claim the space in which to tell her story and to attempt to support herself and her son. In the discussion that follows, I will first focus on the architectural spaces present in the novel, arguing that many are interstitial spaces outright and that Frado transforms several of those that aren't into interstitial spaces. From my discussion of Frado and architectural spaces, I will examine how Wilson consciously constructs her narrative as an interstitial space through her critique of domesticity and public and private spaces.

Our Nig contains many architectural references, the first of which appears on the narrative's title page. The title page reads "Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a two-story White House, North showing that Slavery's Shadows fall even there" (n. pag.). From the very first page of the narrative, Wilson demonstrates a preoccupation with space, specifically with the concept of houses and homes and with the region of the U.S. supposedly associated with freedom. She ostensibly highlights the geographic setting of the narrative to

argue that no place—even Northern locales—are immune from the effects of slavery. Carby asserts that “the ‘two-story white house’ can be interpreted initially as the equivalent of the Southern plantation, in which the protagonist, Frado, was held in virtual slavery” (44). Indeed, Wilson’s description does conjure images of Antebellum plantation houses with enslaved peoples being forced to work long hours with few comforts and little respite. Aside from this brief reference, Wilson makes virtually no references to the geographic location of the Bellmont farm, emphasizing that Frado’s race is more important to how she is treated than whether she lives in the North or the South.

Wilson takes the description further. In the first two chapters of the narrative, Wilson expands her title page description, telling us that the Bellmonts lived “in a large, old-fashioned, white two-story house, envired by fruitful acres, and embellished by shrubbery and shade trees” (Wilson 13). While this passage focuses on the idyllic setting of the Bellmont house, Wilson refrains from describing it specifically as a home. By emphasizing that the events detailed in the narrative occur in a “house,” Wilson clearly differentiates between a house and a home. As stated earlier, nineteenth-century domestic ideologies viewed the home as a sanctuary, as a place where mothers imbued their children with religious and civic virtues. Even when the physical home becomes a contested location, as it does for both Avis in *The Story of Avis* and Lily in *The House of Mirth*, the concept of home typically brings individuals a sense of comfort, solace, and peace. Neither Wilson nor her fictional counterpart ever experienced any sense of these emotions in “the two-story white house” they each lived in for approximately a dozen years. Wilson is, in fact, so preoccupied with the notion of home that she references it either directly or indirectly at least seven times in the first three chapters of the narrative. The first four references are all in connection to Wilson’s description of Frado’s mother, Mag Smith, and in each instance, Wilson pointedly avoids using the term “home.”

Mag epitomizes the fallen woman. Orphaned as a child, Mag, like her daughter after her, has no real knowledge of a home. Forced to make her own way in the world, “she merged into womanhood, unprotected, uncherished, uncared for,” and she falls victim to “a charmer,” to whom “she surrendered . . . a priceless gem, which he proudly garnered as a trophy, with those of other victims, and left her to her fate” (Wilson 5). As Amy Schrager Lang contends, Mag loses her virginity “in one fell swoop” and, due to her status as an orphan, also loses “her already tenuous position in respectable society” (64). After the death of her illegitimate child, Mag realizes her “home, was . . . contaminated by the publicity of her fall” (Wilson 5). This is the only time Wilson uses the term in direct connection with Mag, signaling the fact that Mag’s position as a fallen woman puts her at odds with the very concept of home. Unable to find work, Mag soon decides “to shut herself up in a hovel she had often passed in better days” (6). Although Mag likely moves to “the hovel” because she can live there cheaply, her move also marks her separation from society. Mag does not seem to believe she is worthy of a home; indeed, Mag prefers her “hut” and repeatedly refuses “all offers of a better home than she possessed,” preferring, Wilson implies, to be on her own (6, 7).

Mag manages to eek out an existence for the next several years, seemingly reconciled to her marginalized position in the community as she makes “no effort to escape” (Wilson 7). Her only visitor is Jim, “a kind-hearted African, who called often to inquire after her health and to see if she needed any fuel” (7). Jim’s presence in her life is further representative of Mag’s position in society. If she were a respectable white woman, it seems unlikely that Jim would take it upon himself to try to improve Mag’s situation. Jim, however, seems to genuinely care for Mag and ultimately proposes to her, telling her “You’s had a trial of white folks . . . none of ‘em come near ye to see if you’s dead or alive. I’s black outside, I know, but I’s got a white heart inside. Which you rather have, a black heart in white skin, or a white heart in a black

one?” (9). Lang asserts that Mag agrees primarily out of economic necessity (64); however, Lang and most other critics focus primarily focus on Jim’s declaration that he has “a white heart” in black skin, which clearly refers to the racist connotations of black and white. While the emphasis on the racial implications Jim’s proposal and of their marriage is certainly important, it means that Jim’s final sentence in this chapter, the last thing he says to convince Mag to marry him, is overlooked. Jim secures her hand in marriage by promising her a home: “Take me, Mag. I can give you a better home than this” (Wilson 9). With Jim’s statement, Wilson once again highlights the idea of a home and all that a home is meant to represent, mainly comfort, solace, and security—all things that Mag has had to live without.

According to Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., the standards of family life in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s “all pictured the family” as the “stabilizer of society” (29). The home was meant to be “a refuge from the outside world, a fortress designed to protect, nurture, and strengthen the individuals within it” (29). Mag marries Jim, in part, because he promises to provide her with a home. Jim’s promise of such a space, however, remains largely unfulfilled.

After several years of marriage and two children, Jim dies of consumption, and Mag and their children return “to her hovel again” even though Jim’s partner in their barrel making business encourages her to remain in her home (Wilson 11). Mag’s decision to return to “her hovel” is likely again economic, but it also suggests her disillusionment with the concept of home. Her marriage to Jim should have secured her a permanent home, but his death leaves her penniless and alone. Because she married a black man, Mag has been ostracized from white society and, thus, cannot even benefit from her position as a widow. She returns to “her hovel” because she believes the location is fitting for a life of “an Outcast” (11). Again, out of economic desperation, Mag enters “the darkness of perpetual infamy” when she begins a relationship with Jim’s former partner, Seth, who is also African American. Seth soon convinces

her to desert her eldest daughter Frado, so they can leave town in search of work. Influenced “at every juncture by the hope of economic improvement, however minimal,” Mag agrees to leave Frado at the Bellmont house, “having passed into a state of “‘insensibility’ that alone seems to account for her heartless abandonment” (Lang 64). At this point in the narrative, mid-way through the second chapter, Wilson introduces her readers to the Bellmont house, which is vastly different from Mag’s hovel.

Wilson seems to have taken great care not to refer to the Bellmont house as a home in her initial description. The Bellmonts live “in a large, old-fashioned, two-story white house” (Wilson 13). Years earlier “a youthful couple had consecrated [the house] as a home,” but when they went to their “last repose,” their homestead “passed into the hands of a son, to whose wife Mag applied the epithet ‘she-devil’” (13, 14). This passage implies that the Bellmont house, under the ownership of the current owner’s parents, was a home, but under Mrs. Bellmont’s control, the estate is now nothing more than a house.

Despite Wilson’s suggestion that Mrs. Bellmont prevents “the two-story white house” from being a home, she titles the third chapter “A New Home for Me” (14, 15). Most critics, including White, Foreman, Lang, and Stern, are most interested in this chapter title, as well as the title of the first two chapters, because with Wilson’s use of first person, she ostensibly inserts herself into a narrative that is otherwise written in the third person.⁶⁷ Few, if any, critics discuss her use of the word home, which, in my mind, is at least as significant as her use of first person.

By titling the third chapter as she does, Wilson once again demonstrates a preoccupation with the concept of home. Here she employs the term ironically, as Frado comes to think of the Bellmont house as anything but a home. With this title, Wilson tacitly acknowledges that Frado, as a young mulatta child, has been denied all the protections that a home and domestic spaces are supposed to offer most children. Frado has been cast out by her mother and rejected by society.

She has been offered shelter by the Bellmonts only because Mrs. Bellmont recognizes Frado's inherent economic value—in Frado, she sees the opportunity to raise an ideal servant. Frado, however, is never recognized as the orphaned child she is: she is only seen as a “homeless ‘nigger,’” and by casting her as such Mrs. Bellmont is able “to rationalize [her] economic exploitation” of Frado (Lang 65).

Wilson's use of home in the chapter's title also suggests what Foreman and Pitts describe as her radical rejection of “many aspects of domestic ideology,” namely “the redeeming power of motherhood and the ability of marriage to bring either happiness or stability to women or children” (xxx). Indeed, neither Wilson nor her protagonist has experienced domesticity in such a positive way. For both Wilson and Frado (and for many African American women living in the nineteenth century for that matter), domesticity proves to be exclusive and racist as first Mag and then Frado are denied homes of their own largely on the basis of Mag's status as a fallen woman and her interracial marriage and Frado's race. In fact, despite having spent the first six years of her life in a home with a mother and a father, Frado has no real knowledge of a what a home is, as her parents were often preoccupied with economic hardships, and thus, her natal home often lacked the basic comforts and protections that a home was supposed to provide. Frado only learns what a home is because of her time with the Bellmonts. But her resulting knowledge of home is tainted with her gradual realization that, largely because of her race and her economic status, she cannot have a home of her own. Upon joining the Bellmont household, Frado quickly learns that she is not a member of the family and that the safest place for her is on the fringes of the household, far away from Mrs. Bellmont.

Twenty-four hours after Mag deposits Frado on the doorstep of the Bellmont house, the family gathers to determine what to do with Frado. Mr. Bellmont, who remains silent in this scene, is described as “a kind, humane man, who would not grudge hospitality to the poorest

wanderer. . . The child's desertion by her mother appealed to his sympathy, and he felt inclined to support her" (Wilson 15). He keeps his opinion to himself, however, preferring to let his wife choose Frado's fate. His silence in this scene marks the first of many times Mr. B.⁶⁸ holds his tongue rather than oppose his wife, which "would be like encountering a whirlwind charged with fire, daggers, and spikes" (15). In the absence of Mr. B.'s opinion, Mrs. B. and two of their children, Mary and Jack, determine what is to be done with Frado and where she will fit into the household.

Here, Mrs. B., Mary, and Jack offer three views of Frado and, by extension African American women, that are frequently repeated throughout the narrative by various characters. Mary, declaring "Send her to the County Home," wants nothing to do with her because Frado is "a nigger" (Wilson 15, 16). Jack takes a more sympathetic view, although he offers an equally, if somewhat less harsh, racist opinion: "Keep her. . . She's real handsome and bright, and not very black, either" (16). Jack's declaration suggests he would be as unwilling to help Frado as his sister if she were not "a beautiful mulatto, with long, curly black hair, and handsome roguish eyes" (11). For her part, Mrs. B. responds almost entirely out of material desire: she sees Frado purely as a potential servant, "one to train up in [her] own way from a child" (16). Thus, without ever being asked her view, Frado joins the family as an unpaid servant. Interestingly enough, Frado's cannot be considered an indentured servant as her period of service is never formalized, and no written record of Wilson's own indenture with the Hayward family has ever been found. Indeed, by the time Frado goes to work for the Bellmonts, sometime between 1830 and 1831 (Foreman and Pitts vii), indentured servitude had declined dramatically. In fact, as Kenneth Morgan states in his book *Slavery and Servitude in Colonial North America: A Short History*, indentured servitude "was insignificant in North America" by 1800 and had been replaced by

slavery (2). Thus, it would have been extremely rare for either Frado to have been legally indentured, which explains why there is no mention of a contract in the text.

As for Frado, she accepts the role as it is offered without question, as Wilson presumably accepted a similar role within the Hayward family. That Frado so willingly follows the instructions of the Bellmonts highlights her vulnerability and naïveté. After all, she is only six years old. Her father has recently died, and her mother has just abandoned her. She has no other family that she knows of and absolutely no means to support herself. She can either go to the County Home, as Mary suggests, or stay with the Bellmonts. Frado's choice to stay with the Bellmonts is not much of a choice at all, however. Wilson is careful not to suggest any definite consent to join the Bellmont household on Frado's part at all. Frado simply does as she is told, thinking that she "would not hesitate to wander away should she decide to" (Wilson 17).

Following the family's decision to allow her to stay, Frado is quickly introduced to the Bellmont home and her physical and metaphoric places in it. As I stated in the introduction of this section, Frado is taken to "an unfinished chamber over the kitchen" that has a "slanting" roof and "[a] small half window" to sleep in (Wilson 17). Jack, who escorts Frado to the room, tells his mother that Frado will soon outgrow the room, to which Mrs. B. replies "When she *does*, she'll outgrow the house" (17). Thus, to some extent, Frado's position in the house is dependent upon her ability to exist in a room that is unaccounted for, architecturally speaking, much like Jacobs's garret. The room serves no distinct purpose, as it is too small to be a bedroom and too difficult to reach to be a storeroom. It is, therefore, the only space that Frado is worthy of inhabiting.

As the physical locations that Frado occupies within the Bellmont house are interstitial, so too is her metaphoric position within the family. Frado is both valued and hated for the domestic role she fulfills within the Bellmont family. From the moment Mrs. Bellmont puts the

six-year-old to work washing dishes, Frado becomes an essential part of the household. Initially she is expected to care for the family's cows, wash the dishes after every meal, and keep the many wood boxes in the house full. Frado proves herself very capable at accomplishing these tasks, and every day Mrs. B. gives her "a little more work" to do (Wilson 18). Gradually, Frado is doing the work of a grown woman, and within a few years, she runs the household when Mrs. B. is away. As a servant, Frado proves to be indispensable, and even Mrs. B. is forced to admit that Frado does more work than anyone else in the house. Despite her usefulness in running the household, however, Frado is not integrated into the Bellmont family in any real way.

In fact, Frado occupies the lowest rung of the Bellmont family hierarchy. She is granted certain privileges, largely under the auspices of Mr. B. or Jack. For example, she is allowed to attend school for three years; Jack gives her a dog, whom she claims as her only true confidant; and both Mr. B. and Jack occasionally prevent Mrs. B. and Mary from abusing her. Despite their interventions, as well as those of Aunt Abby, Mr. B.'s sister, and James, the Bellmonts' eldest son, Frado's position in the family remains largely unresolved. To Mrs. B. and Mary, she is a servant, a disobedient, stubborn one at that. Mr. B., James, Jack, and Aunt Abby all seem to recognize Frado's as an individual and value her contributions to the family, but none of them is able to see her as a full-fledged member of the family, despite the love that James and Jack both profess to feel for her. Thus, although she is brought into the family as a young child and grows up alongside several of their children, Frado is never seen as a member of the Bellmont family. She remains on the fringes of the family, much as she remains on the fringes of the house. For her part, Frado never fully accepts any role in the family. In fact, Frado repeatedly rejects the only role that Mrs. B. is willing to offer her—that of submissive servant. Further, Frado is unable to identify any other roles in the family she is willing to fulfill, and she even questions

the definitions of womanhood that nineteenth-century domestic ideology demand she and the other women in the house live up to.

As Joyce W. Warren asserts in her essay “Performativity and the Repositioning of American Literary Realism,” nineteenth-century womanhood was defined by “the image of the ‘true woman’: pure, pious, submissive, dependent, domestic, and selfless” (16). Although the image of the true woman ostensibly applied only to white, middle and upper-class women, black women were expected “to conform to a similar standard” (17). Frado, as both a black female and a member of the servant class, would have been expected to be obedient and subservient to Mrs. B. at all times. Therefore, the “combination of gender, race, and class” (17) would necessarily and automatically cast Frado in a submissive role, which she would have been expected to perform, to tolerate, and even to embrace without question. Frado, however, does not fit the model of the obedient female servant as Warren outlines it. She is neither submissive nor obedient; in fact, she is “wilful” and “determined” even as she completes all of the work that Mrs. B. continually heaps upon her (Wilson sic 17). Frado’s love for James and Jack coupled with her desire to become a Christian do motivate her to behave in ways deemed appropriate for a woman in her position. Nevertheless, Frado is unable to conform to her expected role or to silence herself for very long as a cruel word or a beating from Mrs. B. constantly reminds her that her behavior, whether seen as good or bad, has little effect on the way she is treated. Frado, thus, refuses to perform the role that is prescribed for her with any consistency. Her unwillingness, even as a young child, to correctly perform the role of obedient servant proves that Frado sees very little value in the domestic order or her role, as a black female servant, in it. Her unwillingness to conform enables Frado to ultimately challenge and manipulate the domestic order to her advantage. In the Bellmont household, Mrs. B. and her favorite daughter Mary

seemingly maintain the domestic order. Their version of domesticity, however, is a far cry from what most nineteenth-century advocates of domesticity called for.

In her classic essay “The Cult of True Womanhood,” Barbara Welter draws upon numerous nineteenth century sources to describe how women, particularly women in positions similar to that of Mrs. Bellmont, as well as Mrs. Flint, the slave mistress in Jacobs’s slave narrative, were expected to behave and to manage their homes. In fact, “the cult of true womanhood” as defined by nineteenth-century domestic reformers as well as by Welter and her contemporaries⁶⁹ is racist and classist as it necessarily excludes any woman who is unable to live up to its unattainable ideals. For example, according to Welter’s definition, purity was an essential virtue “to a young woman, its absence . . . unnatural and unfeminine. Without it she was, in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order” (46). Thus, any woman who had lost her purity, even enslaved women who were routinely raped and sexually abused by their white masters and overseers, are not “true women.” Welter reinforces the racist and classist view of womanhood that seemingly empowered women like Mrs. Bellmont and disenfranchised women such as Frado, who could not hope to be seen as a “true woman” because of the color of her skin. “True women” were meant to uphold the “four cardinal virtues” of “piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity”; indeed, women were “promised happiness and power” if they upheld these virtues (44). Further, according to *The Lady’s Token*,⁷⁰ a wife should concern herself with “only domestic affairs” and should “not give [her] advice until [her husband] asks for it” (as cited by Welter 53). A woman was expected to be a wife, and a wife was expected always to “behave in a manner becoming a woman, who had ‘no arms other than gentleness’”; *The Lady’s Token* goes on to enjoin women, “if [your husband] is abusive, never retort” (as cited by Welter 53). A domestic manual entitled *Young Lady’s Guide to the Harmonious Development of Christian Character* (1846)⁷¹ advises women to “become as little children” and

to “avoid a controversial spirit” (as cited by Welter 53). In *Letters to Mothers* (1838), Lydia Howard Sigourney, a well-known writer of both fiction and domestic manuals, instructed her fellow wives and mothers, “To bear the evils and sorrows which may be appointed us, with a patient mind” (252). She argues that this “should be the continual effort of our sex” as “[i]t seems . . . to be expected of us; since the passive and enduring virtues are more immediately within our province” (252).

While it is important to note that these descriptions are meant to be ideals, Mrs. B. falls short on nearly every count—as does Mrs. Flint, whom I will discuss in greater detail later in the section. Mrs. B. is not pious, submissive, pure, or particularly domestic. On the rare occasions that her husband demands her obedience, she obeys unwillingly and even openly laments what she sees as Mr. B.’s harsh treatment of her, crying “Oh, dear! I did not think it would come to this; that my own husband would treat me so” (Wilson 27). Rather than behave as a child and avoid controversy, Mrs. B. acts like a “she-devil” (12). She is known throughout the community as being “haughty, undisciplined, arbitrary and severe. In common parlance, she was a *scold*, a thorough one” (15).⁷² In fact, Mrs. B. is a tyrant, feared by her own husband and children, with the exception of Mary. As several critics, Stern, Foreman, and Warren among them, note, Mrs. B. is the antithesis of the true woman. Wilson, in fact, uses Mrs. B. to subvert “the stereotype of white womanhood” and to undercut “the image of maternal affection believed to be inherent in the definition of white motherhood” (Warren 17). The version of domesticity that Mrs. B. relies on is not one of safety, affection, “comfort,” or “cheer” (Welter 55). It is one of “violence and mortal danger” (Stern 448) as she commands her home not through “mercy and gentleness” (Welter 55) but through brutality, meanness, and terror. Rather than teach either her own children or Frado that a home is meant to be a sanctuary from the outside world, Mrs. B. shows

them that a home is a place to escape from and that domesticity is a tool for controlling those deemed inferior.

Mrs. B., even as she can be seen as the antithesis of true womanhood, must still bend to the will of her husband, at least occasionally. While Wilson does characterize Mr. B. as “a kind, humane man,” she also describes him as non-confrontational and passive, traits that are typically attributed to women during this period. In fact, throughout the narrative, Mr. B. is seen leaving the house rather than allow “a tempest . . . to envelop him” (Wilson 20). Instead of curbing his wife’s increasingly vicious treatment of Frado (or even her overly harsh treatment of their own children), Mr. B. usually does nothing, telling his sister, who openly questions his behavior, “Women rule the earth, and all in it.” When Aunt Abby reminds him that he rules his home and urges him to take control, if only to protect Frado, he quietly responds, “[a]nd live in hell meantime” (25). Here, Wilson inverts the roles of Mr. and Mrs. B.; she becomes the powerful, domineering husband while he acts as the submissive wife. His frequent absences from the house and his preference for avoiding confrontations not only allow Mrs. B. to do as she desires, but it also enables her to construct her home in such a way that is ultimately damaging to Frado and every member of the household.

Mrs. Bellmont’s version of domesticity—as well as Frado’s response to it—results in an inversion of public and private spaces. Julia Stern notes that “domestic and civil spaces undergo a fascinating reversal” in *Our Nig* (448). As Stern argues, Mrs. B. turns private spaces such as the kitchen and dining room into sites of violence and torture. It seems that Mrs. B. is only able to beat Frado in the seclusion of these private spaces, which are typically associated with the most positive aspects of domesticity. In fact, each of the major beatings described in the narrative occurs in the kitchen, begins in the kitchen, or concludes in the kitchen, a spatial location that is coded by nineteenth-century domestic ideology as private, feminine, and a source of power for

women. The kitchen is the one location in the house that Mrs. B. controls completely, and she frequently reminds Frado that she is hers to control.

The first reference to Frado's kitchen beatings occurs shortly after Frado begins working for the Bellmonts. As Frado becomes accustomed to her extensive workload, she realizes she must also accept "words that burn" and "frequent blows on her head" from her mistress (Wilson 18). Mrs. B. also "appl[ies] a raw-hide, always at hand in the kitchen" any time she finds the six-year-old Frado "silently [weeping] over her sad fate" (18). As Wilson's descriptions of these abuses indicate, Mrs. B. uses these frequent punishments as a way to control Frado and to remind her of her place in the family. In fact, both Mrs. B. and Mary profess to believe that the only way "to subdue" Frado and "to keep her down" is through physical force (19), and neither ever hesitates to use such force on Frado.

Frado's first major beating takes place after Frado has accused Mary of lying. One day, on their walk home from school, Mary orders Frado to cross a stream by walking through it rather than over the plank bridge. When Frado refuses, Mary tries to force her to cross. "[I]n the struggle to force [Frado] over," Mary loses her balance and falls into the stream (Wilson 20). When Mary arrives home, she announces "Nig pushed me into the stream!" (20). Frado vehemently denies Mary's accusations and relates the actual events. Mrs. B., however, is unable to tolerate "that black nigger call[ing] Mary a liar" and demands that Mr. B. beat Frado (20). Although he refuses to follow with his wife's request, he quickly leaves the house, giving his tacit permission for Mrs. B. to beat Frado. Mary and Mrs. B. move Frado to the kitchen, where they "commenced beating her inhumanely; then propping her mouth open with a piece of wood, shut her up in a dark room" (20). That Mrs. B. and Mary take Frado to the kitchen to beat her is as significant as their physical silencing of her after they beat her. Their silencing, as Cynthia Davis contends in her essay "Speaking the Body's Pain: Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*," renders

Frado mute and prevents her from voicing “her own pain” (399).⁷³ Their decision to silence Frado further oppresses her as it leaves her unable to cry out to any of the Bellmonts who would likely come to her aid. That they perform the beating in the kitchen signals that they both realize Mr. B. would not (and does not) condone their actions. The spatial location of this first beating highlights Mrs. B.’s need for privacy and control. In her kitchen, she is guaranteed both. Her insistence on beating Frado almost exclusively in the kitchen, the interior location where Frado most often works, also emphasizes Mrs. B.’s desire to control Frado through fear. The kitchen, which is typically seen as the heart of the home, offers a young black woman like Frado none of the same protections or privileges it affords Mrs. B. and her daughter.

The next beating that Wilson describes in detail marks the first time Frado attempts to escape Mrs. B. and Mary’s brutality. Following an episode in which Frado fails to bring Mrs. B. the correct size wood to start a fire in the kitchen hearth, Mrs. B.

kicked her so forcibly as to throw her upon the floor. Before [Frado] could rise, another foiled the attempt, and then followed kick after kick in quick succession and power, till she reached the door. Mr. Bellmont and Aunt Abby, hearing the noise, rushed in, just in time to see the last of the performance. (Wilson 25)

As a result of Abby and Mr. B.’s rare appearance in the kitchen, Frado “jumped up, and rushed from the house, out of sight”; she hides herself near “an outbuilding on the property,” knowing Mrs. B. will not attempt to punish her outside the confines of the private sphere (25, 26).

Sheltered by the outbuilding, Frado is in a public place, where any one walking the property could see Frado, yet in this public location, she experiences more privacy and protection than she ever does in any room of the Bellmont home. By claiming this public site as a hiding space, Frado accomplishes two key actions. First, she inverts a public space into a private one,

transforming outbuilding into an interstitial location. Second, and most importantly for the purposes of my argument, she claims the interstitial space as her own, which enables her, if only briefly, to lay claim to her own voice and her own experience. Frado stakes her claim to herself when she tells Aunt Abby, who has come to look for her and to encourage her to return to the house, “I ain’t going in any more. . . I’ve got to stay out here and die. I han’n’t got no mother, no home. I wish I was dead” (26). Offering Frado more understanding than anyone has yet in the text, Aunt Abby leaves her to her grief.

Frado’s declaration marks the first time she verbalizes the physical and emotional pain of her experience. As Davis suggests, Frado’s ability to express and to describe her pain places her in the position of an “authoritative speaking subject” rather than a silenced object (400). While I agree with Davis’s assessment, I want to extend her argument to assert that Frado can only become an “authoritative speaking subject” in the interstitial spaces she occupies at various points in the narrative. Thus, Frado’s ability to locate power and to resist the abuse Mrs. B. inflicts upon her is dependent upon physical location. The outbuilding’s status as neither a wholly public nor wholly private location enables Frado to claim the space as her own grants Frado the room to express her feelings and to announce her pain as candidly as she does. Further, the interstitiality of the outbuilding also allows Aunt Abby to comfort Frado. Neither Frado nor Aunt Abby are able to acknowledge the brutality of Frado’s life in any space that Mrs. B. controls. Frado, therefore, is unable to locate power in any of the private spaces described in the narrative because Mrs. B.’s control over these spaces verges on the absolute. Frado can only exercise control over herself and her voice when she leaves the private spaces of the Bellmont home for the semi-public, outdoor spaces of the Bellmont farm. Just as Avis Dobell of *The Story of Avis* feels most free and most creative in outdoor spaces that are separate from feminine, interior locations of the private sphere, so too does Frado feel similarly empowered in public,

outdoor spots that Mrs. B. has no control over. These public locations, which include the exterior of the outbuilding, the fields, and the roof of the barn are not fully public, however, because they are only accessible to members of the Bellmont family, their servants, and visitors to the farm. These spaces are further rendered interstitial because Frado uses them to voice her private feelings about her experiences with the Bellmonts.

While Frado does ultimately use an interstitial location to openly confront Mrs. B. and, thus, to claim ownership over herself, she makes at least two attempts to protect herself in a private, interior locations. When Frado is fourteen, Mr. and Mrs. B. travel to Baltimore to spend several weeks with their eldest son James. Mary is left in charge, “in name merely, for Nig was the only moving power in the house” (Wilson 35). After weeks of doing “all the washing, ironing, baking, and the common *et cetera* of the household duties,” Frado becomes ill (35),⁷⁴ but Frado continues to be ordered about by Mary. Driven to the point of exhaustion, she struggles, however, to accomplish the work Mary heaps upon her: “Nig would work while she could remain erect, then sink down upon the floor, or a chair, until she could rally for a fresh effort” (36). On “one of [Frado’s] sickest days,” Mary, who refuses to acknowledge that Frado is sick, demands that Frado bring her wood. When Frado doesn’t satisfy Mary’s demands quickly enough, Mary shouts, “What are you gone so long, for? Bring it in quick, I say.” Frado, barely able to stand upright, is unable to tolerate Mary’s orders any longer and tells Mary, perhaps somewhat impudently, “I am coming as quick as I can” (36). Ordinarily, Frado would have remained silent and simply fulfilled Mary’s orders once she had rested. Here, Frado determines, almost unconsciously, that she will stand up for herself and reminds Mary she can only do so much at any given moment. Although this is a brief declaration, Frado does attempt to tell Mary that she, not Mary or Mrs. B., is more in control of her body than they may realize. She may have no control over the illness that has weakened her physical body, but Frado is able to

determine when she is too sick to work. By telling Mary that she is doing her best to complete her numerous tasks, Frado tries to protect herself and to claim ownership over her own body. Frado, unfortunately, speaks out in the kitchen—a private, interior location in which she has never been able to successfully express herself. She is unsuccessful again as Mary maintains dominion over both the kitchen and Frado. Reminding Frado that she is, in fact, in charge and that her orders must be obeyed, Mary responds violently: “‘Saucy, impudent Nigger, you! Is [this] the way you answer me?’ and taking a large carving knife from the table, she hurled it, in her rage, at the defenceless girl” (sic 36). Mary reiterates that Frado is not safe in any interior, domestic spaces, least of all the kitchen.

Frado does, however, attempt to stand up for herself in the kitchen one other time. In this scene, Frado is trying to wash dishes. Overworked by Mrs. B. and exhausted, both mentally and physically, by caring for an ill James, who has come to his parents’ home to die, Frado becomes ill and struggles to keep up with her work:

Her health was impaired . . . Mrs. Bellmont, she well knew, would have no sympathy for her. She was at last reduced as to be unable to stand to wash her dishes; if she heard the well-known step of her mistress, she would rise until [Mrs. B.] returned to her room, and then sink down further for rest. (Wilson 46)

While Frado endeavors to conceal her illness from her mistress, she grows weaker and is unable to complete her work fast enough to please Mrs. B. When Mrs. B. demands she work faster, Frado simply says “I am sick . . . and cannot stand long, I feel so bad” (46). As in the earlier scene with Mary, Frado only talks back to her mistress because she is ill. She is driven to express herself purely out of a need to rest and recuperate. Under ordinary circumstances, she likely would not have responded to Mrs. B.’s complaints at all, and she certainly would not have

tried to resist Mrs. B. in the kitchen, the location of so many of Frado's beatings. Ironically, Mary only threatened Frado, but Mrs. B. responds to Frado's perceived disobedience violently:

Angry that [Frado] should venture a reply to her command, she suddenly inflicted a blow which lay the tottering girl prostrate on the floor. Excited by so much indulgence of a dangerous passion, she seemed left to unrestrained malice; and snatching a towel, stuffed the mouth of the sufferer, and beat her cruelly. (46)

This episode, coupled with Frado's kitchen confrontation with Mary, serves to remind Frado that she has no power in any private locations. Domestic spaces may be sites of empowerment for white women, but for Frado, and for black women in positions similar to hers, they are sites of pain and brutality. While Mrs. B. seeks to remind Frado that she is powerless over her own body, Mrs. B. inadvertently demonstrates that Frado is, in fact, powerful in the moments that she uses her voice. By forcibly silencing Frado, as she does repeatedly throughout the narrative, Mrs. B. unconsciously reveals that Frado can claim agency over herself by calling out for help. Mrs. B. ostensibly silences Frado so no one will hear her cries for help and prevent her from beating Frado. In silencing her, Mrs. B. also shows Frado that she is not all powerful or in complete control of Frado. If Frado were physically able to cry for help, she would surely be rescued by James, Abby, or Mr. B., and Mrs. B. would face the disapproval of her husband and son.

While Frado does ultimately stand up to Mrs. B., she does so only beyond the confines of the private sphere and only after Mr. B. has encouraged her to do so. Late in the narrative, as Frado is approaching the end of her period of servitude, Mr. B. finally tells her that he is unable and unwilling to protect her from his wife. He "talked with her seriously, told her he had seen her many times punished undeservedly; he did not wish to have her saucy or disrespectful, but

when she was *sure* she did not deserve a beating, to avoid it if she could. ‘You are looking sick,’ he added, ‘you cannot endure beating as you once could’” (Wilson 58).⁷⁵ I draw attention to this relatively brief exchange between Frado and Mr. B. before analyzing Frado’s subsequent confrontation with Mrs. B. for several reasons. First, I want to note both Mr. B.’s timing and word choice. Mr. B. only offers his passive support and advice after Frado has lived in his home for over a decade, during which time he has seen her beaten countless times and has only acted to stop or prevent the beatings a few times. Further, despite his seemingly caring and concerned tone, that he instructs her to avoid a beating only if “she was *sure*” she did not deserve it suggests that he believes there have been times when she did deserve to be beaten. He also advises her to avoid abuse only when she can do so without being “saucy or disrespectful” to Mrs. B., who has never demonstrated any compassion or respect for Frado. Further, Mr. B. is only encouraging Frado to stand up for herself now that she is unable to handle the beatings as she “once could,” seemingly acknowledging that he allowed the abuse to continue when he deemed Frado physically about to withstand the beatings his inflicted upon her. Most importantly, Mr. B.’s directions can be seen as excusing himself from any responsibility to protect and defend Frado or to exert control over his wife and his home. Mr. B. again implies that he has no power in his home; in his mind, he is as much of a victim to his wife’s domineering ways as Frado. Critic Joyce W. Warren argues that Mr. B. represents a subversion of white manhood, as he “does not fit the image of the aggressive maleness” present in the nineteenth-century concept of individualism (17). Warren goes so far as to describe him as afraid of his wife, “and although he is upset by her cruelty to Frado and occasionally protests, he does not stop the abuse” (17). While Warren is correct in her assessment that Mr. B. rarely acts to stop the abuse, I contend that her—as well as his own—characterization of Mr. B. as powerless in his own home is an exaggeration. Mr. B. can manage both his wife and his

household when he chooses to do so. While he claims “Women rule the earth, and all in it” (Wilson 25), he is, in fact, as Barbara White reminds us, the head of the household and “makes the big decisions” (39). He is the one who “declared decisively that [Frado] *should* go to school” against his wife’s wishes (Wilson 18).⁷⁶ He also overrules Mrs. B. when “he proclaims that [their daughter] Jane” can marry whom she chooses (White 39). Despite her very vocal protests, Mrs. B. “accepts her husband’s authority as head of household” (39). For example, on one of the rare occasions when Mr. B. explicitly tells his wife “You shall not strike, or scald, or skin [Frado], as you call it,” Mrs. B. protests, but she obeys him (Wilson 27). It is simply easier for him to allow his wife free reign than to accept that it is his responsibility to protect Frado. When he instructs Frado “to avoid” a beating when she can, he elects, once again, to play the part of the passive husband who cannot manage his him or to protect the more vulnerable members of the household. For her part, Frado chooses to follow his instructions, and following this conversation, she is presented with a chance to follow his directions.

In a dramatic, albeit brief scene, Mrs. B. sends Frado for wood, and as she has so many times before, she becomes impatient when Frado doesn’t return fast enough. What marks this particular scene as noticeably different, however, is that rather than wait for Frado to return to the kitchen, so she can punish her, Mrs. Bellmont follows her outdoors to the woodpile and plans to punish her there. Frado seizes the moment and defends herself, shouting

“Stop! . . . strike me, and I’ll never work a mite more for you”; and
 throwing down what she had gathered, stood like one who feels the
 stirring of free and independent thoughts. By this unexpected
 demonstration, her mistress, in amazement, dropped her weapon,
 desisting from her purpose of chastisement. Frado walked towards the
 house, her mistress following with the wood she herself was sent after.

(Wilson 58)

While the critics who analyze this scene⁷⁷ focus on Frado's words, arguing that she demands an end to the physical abuse because she has finally reached her breaking point, I contend that the location of their confrontation is as significant as Frado's state of mind. There is no doubt that Frado, some ten or eleven years into her period of indenture, has endured unimaginable physical and mental abuse. As Davis argues, Frado "takes control of [her] pain"; the very act of claiming her right to resist a beating enables her to "[wrest] power from her torturer and [appropriate] it for herself" (399). Davis's assessment is certainly correct, but what enables Frado to take power from Mrs. B. and claim it as her own is the fact that Mrs. B. followed her to the woodpile. Much as the outbuilding did earlier in the narrative, the woodpile functions as an interstitial space. Its proximity to the house renders it somewhat private, but its outdoor location and its accessibility to anyone on the farm makes it public. Further, because it is removed from the interior of the house, it is beyond Mrs. B.'s domain. The interstitial nature of the woodpile, then, enables Frado to claim her right to protect herself, to remind Mrs. B. that she is a person in her own right, and to end this particular beating successfully. This scene marks the first time two things occur in the narrative: this is the first time Mrs. B. has tried to abuse Frado outside the confines of the domestic sphere, and this is also the first time Frado has empowered herself and resisted Mrs. B. in an interstitial location. Every prior occasion of Frado's resistance occurs in an interior location that falls under her mistress's control. By following Frado out of doors, Mrs. B. has unwittingly relinquished her power as they no longer occupy a completely private location. In the interstitial space of the woodpile, Frado is able to defend herself, and in doing so, she reminds Mrs. B. that her power only extends so far.

Frado's triumphant moment also signals a change in her relationship with Mrs. B. Although she still endures "[t]he usual amount of scolding" in the following year, Frado suffers

“fewer whippings” (Wilson 59). While it is clear that Mrs. B. still views Frado as less than human after their confrontation, her decision to beat Frado with less frequency and brutality suggests two things that further help Frado in her quest for freedom. First, Mrs. B. begins to view Frado as a potential physical threat as a result of Frado’s declaration. That she considers Frado a threat, even if only a potential one, suggests that she recognizes she can no longer control Frado completely. While Mrs. B. may not see Frado as a person, worthy of the same rights and privileges that she herself enjoys, she does seem to realize that Frado sees herself as such. In addition, Mrs. B.’s decision to beat Frado less often may stem from her realization that Frado is nearing eighteen years old and the end of her period of servitude. At eighteen Frado will be able to leave the Bellmonts’ home;⁷⁸ should she decide to do so, she would leave Mrs. B. without a source of free labor. As Barbara White correctly surmises, Mrs. B.’s interest in Frado is primarily financial. She may, therefore, alter her treatment of Frado in an attempt to convince her to stay; Frado, after all, only has “worth to Mrs. Bellmont as a workhorse” (33). Regardless of how Mrs. B. treats Frado after this altercation, Frado herself changes, as she begins to realize that she is more than a “workhorse” and to contemplate her life once she leaves the Bellmonts.

Following the scene at the woodpile, Wilson concludes Frado’s story somewhat suddenly, including only two more short chapters. Despite her profound fear about what sort of life might await her beyond the confines of the Bellmont home, Frado does leave. Wilson recounts Frado’s subsequent years of hardship as she struggles to support herself, which include a brief return to her tiny room at the Bellmonts’ when Frado becomes too ill to work or to care for herself (Wilson 66). Eventually Frado moves to Boston, where she works for “a plain, poor, simple woman who could see merit beneath a dark skin” (68). Under the instruction of this woman, who is never named, Frado experiences the beneficial nature of private, domestic spaces

for the first time in her life. In what was most likely the woman's kitchen,⁷⁹ the room of the house where Frado had endured so much abuse, the woman teaches Frado

the value of useful books; and while one read aloud to the other of deeds of historic and names renowned, Frado experienced a new impulse. She felt herself capable of elevation; she felt that this book information supplied an undefined dissatisfaction she had long felt, but could not express. (69)

With this woman's help, Frado experiences the safety of a fully private location for the first time. In this warm, safe kitchen, Frado is able to move beyond her past and begin to hope for the future. That this is the last direct reference to any architectural space in the narrative also signals the importance that the woman and her home had for Frado. Her experiences in this probably kitchen enable Frado—and by extension Wilson—to dream of a home of her own. Wilson's desire for such a space is her primary motivation for creating Frado and writing *Our Nig*, as she reveals in both the narrative's preface and the final chapter.

While Frado is able to challenge the boundaries of the physical spaces she inhabits by locating moments of power in spaces I have defined as interstitial, Wilson similarly challenges the boundaries of metaphoric spaces by positioning her narrative as an interstitial space in and of itself. Ostensibly, as I have stated earlier in the section, Wilson writes *Our Nig* in a sincere attempt to earn enough money to support herself and her son, whom she had been forced to send to various county homes and friends' homes when she was either too ill or too impoverished to care for him.⁸⁰ The complexity of *Our Nig*, however, reveals that Wilson sought to do much more than economically support herself and her son. As Foreman and Pitts assert, Wilson wanted to challenge “the racially neutral category of northern indenture,” as she argues that race accounts almost exclusively for “the circumstances and experiences” of her life (xxxii). Further,

Wilson saw *Our Nig* as a way to interrogate the prevalent domestic ideologies that enslaved her within the private sphere but offered her no protection from the brutality she suffered within that sphere. Thus, Wilson used *Our Nig* and the resulting narrative space she created to achieve both private and public purposes. Indeed, by the time Wilson determine that writing *Our Nig* was the only way she could hope to support her son, the public and private spheres were inextricably intertwined in her life.

As a black woman, Wilson has a conflicted relationship with the public sphere; she was largely invisible—but also overly visible—in the eyes of American society as a whole, yet she had to live much of her life in the public realm in order to survive economically. Likewise, she had limited access to the private sphere; at best, she could hope to find employment as a maid or a seamstress to earn a living, but she was not able to afford to own or even rent a home of her own until later in her life.⁸¹ In her best economic circumstances, Wilson could afford to rent a room for herself and her son, but she still had to leave behind the relative sanctity of this domestic space to work in the public sphere.

Thus, the only space Wilson could claim as her own was a metaphoric space. Without access to any physical spaces of her own, she constructed her narrative as the one space she could truly call her own. *Our Nig*, then, is much more than an autobiographical tale of one young black woman's experiences as an indentured servant living in the North. It is a metaphoric space in which Wilson uses her fictional counterpart, Frado, and her manipulation and creation of physical interstitial spaces to critique the public and private realms that neither woman can access fully as well as the domestic ideologies that oppress them nearly as much as the racism and classism they face on a daily basis. While Frado challenges these borders and conventions by crossing and even altering the boundaries of physical spaces and transforming them into interstitial spaces, Wilson does not have access to physical spaces, at least not at this

point in her life. Therefore, she consciously creates her narrative as an interstitial space so that she can question the ways as a black, working-class woman, she is limited by the public and private realms. Frado recognizes the woodpile beyond the Bellmont kitchen as an interstitial space and uses its interstitiality to resist Mrs. B. and to claim ownership over herself, but Wilson uses the interstitial nature of *Our Nig* to resist racism and classism as well as to challenge the conventions of both the public and private realms that dictate that her position as a black servant guarantees her has no real place in either realm. Wilson, thus, changes her narrative into a space in which she can tell her story in her own words, in a way that she chooses—emphasizing the racial, class, and spatial boundaries she must transgress in order to do so. By writing *Our Nig*, Wilson not only succeeds in claiming Frado's and her own subjectivity, but she also succeeds in finding a space—perhaps even a home—of her own.

3.2 Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl tells story of Linda Brent, the fictional name for Harriet Jacobs in her published autobiographical narrative. Brent describes her early childhood as idyllic and peaceful, declaring in the narrative's opening sentence, "I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six happy years of childhood had passed" (Jacobs 9). Permitted to live with her father, who hired out his time as a carpenter, her mother, and her younger brother in a home of their own, Brent only becomes aware that she is enslaved at six, after her mother's unexpected death. She is then sent to live with her mother's mistress, whom Brent describes "as so kind to me that I was always glad to do her bidding, and proud to labor for her as much as my young years would permit" (11). When, some six years later, Brent's mistress dies, Brent is bequeathed to her mistress's five-year-old niece, and she is sent to live in the household of Dr. and Mrs. Flint, the parents of Brent's child-mistress. In the Flint household, Brent is quickly educated to the harsh realities of slavery, which she has been largely sheltered from in the twelve years of

her life. Brent quickly becomes a target of Dr. Flint's lecherous advances and a victim of Mrs. Flint's jealous plots. Knowing she will only be able to protect herself from Dr. Flint for so long, Brent begins a consensual affair with a local white lawyer, Mr. Sands; while Brent does succeed in avoiding Dr. Flint's advances, she also bears two children by Mr. Sands. When Dr. Flint threatens to move her children to his plantation, Brent decides to escape, and she ends up hiding in a tiny garret in her grandmother's house for seven years. Brent finally flees to the North only after both her children are safely away from Dr. Flint. With the help of her employer Mrs. Bruce, Brent eventually secures her freedom legally, and she establishes a life for herself. Much like Frado suffered as a result of the many beatings she endured, Brent also suffers long-term physical damage from her time in hiding, which limits the ways in which she is able to support herself and her children economically.

This brief synopsis reveals much about Brent's life in slavery and her resulting interstitial existence, including the differences between her life and Wilson's protagonist and the interstitial nature of her daily existence. There are two key differences between Brent and Frado. First, Frado has no connection with her family from the moment her mother leaves her on the Bellmonts' doorstep, but Brent successfully maintains lifelong relationships with many of her family members, including both her children. Second, because Frado cannot be easily categorized—her status as an indentured female servant who is struggling to determine her place in American society prevents Frado from definitively identifying herself as one thing or another—she is clearly living an interstitial life, both in terms of the spaces she occupies and the ways she attempts to define herself. Brent's position as an enslaved woman places her, in some ways, in a clearly defined role. Whereas Frado struggles to know herself and to understand how she is expected to behave in the various spaces she encounters, Brent has a clear understanding of both her role as an enslaved woman and her role must change according to the various spaces

she occupies. Despite this understanding, however, Brent's intense desire to free herself (and her children) is constantly at odds with the profound devotion she has for her extended family, particularly her grandmother. The angst she experiences over this conflict prevents her from defining herself on her own terms. That she sees herself as Mrs. Flint's slave, Dr. Flint's object of desire, her grandmother's confidant, and her children's protector before she is able to see herself as simply Linda actually renders her life as interstitial as Frado's because both women struggle to determine who they are according to their own dreams and desires—Brent's understanding of public and private spaces, however, means she has a somewhat easier time negotiating her interstitial existence than Frado.

Before I move to a discussion of the various spaces Brent—and, thus, Jacobs—inhabits and transgresses, I want to discuss briefly how Brent's family actually complicates her ability to negotiate these spaces. Much has been written about Jacobs's connection to her family. Jean Fagan Yellin, in her 2004 biography of Jacobs, notes the deep bonds Jacobs shared with her grandmother, her brother, and her uncle (8, 25); Jacobs took great care to emphasize the importance of these bonds when writing as Brent. Carolyn Sorsio argues that Brent defines herself first in terms of her familial connections, which gives her a “collective identity and destiny,” which cannot be separated from that of her family (5). Sorsio goes on to point out that, as a result of her “collective identity,” “the most important decisions in [Brent's] life stem not from what she wants as an individual, but rather what is best for her family; she balances the emotions of all family members and strives for the collective best solution” (5, 7). Gloria T. Randle also recognizes how Brent's deep love for her family guided any decision she made. Randle cites Brent's grandmother as the single most important influence in Brent's life, as she has instilled a “strict moral code” in Brent (45). While Brent's connection to her family clearly functions as a source of strength for her, it also reinforces the interstitial nature of her position as

an enslaved woman who is trying to balance her individual freedom with “her allegiance to her children and her grandmother” (Sorsio 6). In fact, while her family’s influence, especially that of her grandmother, has helped heighten her understanding of her position as an enslaved woman and the resulting spaces she is limited to, it has not helped her negotiate or transgress either of her role or these spaces in any way.

Jean Fagan Yellin identifies Jacobs’s grandmother Molly Horniblow as “a model of successful womanhood” for Jacobs (25). As “a single mother denied legal marriage who had managed to raise five children and to free herself and her oldest son,” Aunt Marthy, the fictionalized name Jacobs gives her grandmother in the narrative, certainly represents the ideals that Brent strives to live up to (Jacobs 10). Aunt Marthy is “faithful,” “spirited,” and “so loving, so sympathizing!” (12, 14, 18). By sheer will and persistence, as well as her faithful and honorable service to the same family for over forty years, Aunt Marthy managed to instill a sense of family, morality, and piety into the children who had not been sold away from her (14). She also manages to be a mother to Brent and her brother after their mother’s death. In fact,

By perseverance and unwearied industry, she was [the] mistress of a snug little home, surrounded with the necessities of life . . . There we always found sweet balsam for our troubles. She was so loving, so sympathizing! She always met us with a smile, and listened with patience to all our sorrows. She spoke so hopefully that unconsciously the clouds gave place to sunshine. (18)

As a surrogate mother to Brent, her grandmother shares her views on domesticity, motherhood, and womanhood with her. Although Brent never succinctly describes her grandmother’s views on any of these issues, it is clear from various conversations and Brent’s numerous references to her grandmother as “faithful,” “strict,” and “virtuous” that Aunt Marthy

subscribes to a version of the cult of true womanhood (Jacobs 27, 28).⁸² Thus, she expects her granddaughter, as Sorsio asserts, to “maintain a [high] standard of chastity in both [her] language and action” (8). It is important to note that the values that Aunt Marthy upholds are rooted in both Western European *and* African concepts of motherhood. As Barbara Omolade asserts in *The Rising Song of African American Women*, the African woman, as she was first encountered by European men, was “a wife, a mother, a daughter, a sister, nestled in tribal societies and protected by fathers, husbands, and brothers who upheld the sanctity and primacy of marriage and motherhood for women” (3). Thus, the view of womanhood that Brent inherits from her grandmother is as influenced by African notions of womanhood as it is by Western European and American constructs.

Aunt Marthy’s influence over Brent is so profound that Brent seems to have accepted her views on womanhood without question. At the very least, it is clear that neither Brent nor her grandmother considered how detrimental this particular view of womanhood could be to enslaved women. In fact, despite the love and affection she clearly feels for Brent, Aunt Marthy’s nurturing “is not unilaterally beneficent” (Randle 45). In fact, while Aunt Marthy “clearly understands on one level that her authority is compromised by the system of slavery, on a deeper level she rejects this reality” (45). As Randle suggests, Aunt Marthy’s emphasis on purity and chastity is at direct odds with “her belief that ‘the master’ must be obeyed . . . Brent’s grandmother condemns out of hand any act of immorality on the part of the slaves at the same time that she urges obedience of the laws of slavery” (45-6). Her grandmother teaches Brent that she must preserve her virtue and dignity, but because she also emphasizes that Brent must respect and obey her master, Aunt Marthy does not offer her granddaughter any useful tools to accomplish both of these tasks. Thus, Brent must negotiate the vast divide between these two beliefs on her own. While her grandmother does not help Brent face the moral challenges of

slavery—challenges that she is, at least, somewhat responsible for creating—her grandmother does teach Brent that women, even African American women, can locate moments of power in private, domestic spaces.

Under her grandmother's tutelage, Brent learns that a woman is meant to have some control over her own home, specifically the domestic, feminine spaces of the home, such as the kitchen, the dining room, and the sitting room. Omolade suggests that black women “would find private space in cleaning her house, tending her garden, fixing her room with doilies and trinkets. . . In this world there was space for her pull herself together. The space was contained and narrow,” but it enabled her to escape the influence of whites, even if only briefly (11). Because Aunt Marty actually owns her home, she is able to differentiate between the public and private spaces of her home. In fact, once she is no longer enslaved, where Aunt Marthy is most often seen in the private, domestic spaces of her home, spaces that she considers the ones in which women have the most agency. That she views these spaces as empowering is apparent in these scenes in which she chastises Dr. Flint for his abusive treatment of Brent and questions Mr. Sands about becoming sexually involved with Brent.

After Brent reveals that she had willingly engaged in a sexual relationship with Mr. Sands, her grandmother requests that he come to her home so she may speak with him about Brent's fate. Although Brent does not identify the location of this interview, it seems unlikely that Aunt Marthy would have had such a conversation on the porch, where she later has several conversations with Mr. Sands. Given the highly private nature of this conversation, it seems much more likely that Aunt Marthy would have invited Mr. Sands into her home and conducted the interview in a private location, such as her sitting or dining room. In the course of the interview, Aunt Marthy asks Mr. Sands “why he could not have left her one ewe lamb,—whether there were not plenty of slaves who did not care about character” (Jacobs 49). By asking this

question, Aunt Marthy reminds Sands that he has not behaved honorably toward her granddaughter. In fact, she all but accuses him of taking advantage of Brent's vulnerable position. That she asks such a question reveals that, despite her disappointment in Brent, she sees Sands as equally accountable for her granddaughter's immoral behavior. She is able to chastise Sands so strongly for two key reasons. First, he has limited power over Brent, so even if Aunt Marthy offends him with her questions, he is unlikely to direct his anger towards Brent.⁸³ Aunt Marthy is also able to criticize what she sees as Sands's immorality because they are in a space that she controls, a feminine domestic space that is representative of her belief that women must teach their daughters and granddaughters to behave virtuously and honorably. Sands's response reflects the power Aunt Marthy wields in this space. Unable to address her accusations without admitting his own immorality, "he made no answer; but he spoke kind and encouraging words. He promised to care for [Brent's] child, and to buy [Brent], be the conditions what they might" (49-50). While Aunt Marthy's interview with Sands ends favorably and reminds Brent that a black woman does have some power in her own home, her interviews with Dr. Flint do not produce such clear results.

Aunt Marthy actually confronts Dr. Flint twice, the first time when she calls on him in his study to ask that she be allowed to purchase Brent's freedom. She tells Brent that she will remind him how long and how faithfully she had served in the family and how she had taken her own baby from her breast to nourish his wife. She would tell him I had been out of the family so long they would not miss me, that she would pay them for my time, and the money would procure a woman who had more strength for the situation than I had. I begged her not to go; but she persisted in saying, "He will listen to me, Linda." (Jacobs 70)

Aunt Marthy is, as Brent expected, turned away “coolly” by Dr. Flint (71), and I argue that he turns her away at least partially because she makes this request in a space that he controls completely. In his own study, he is all powerful, and Aunt Marthy is nothing more than a former enslaved woman, who has no right to ask anything of him. That he listens to her calmly and with some respect signals that he recognizes the limited power she maintains in the community—after all, she has already humiliated him once by demanding she be sold publicly.⁸⁴ Even though he refuses Aunt Marthy, he is careful not to disrespect her because of her prominent position among the whites and blacks of their community.

After Brent escapes, Aunt Marthy confronts Dr. Flint for a second time. She does so from the safety of her own kitchen. Dr. Flint enters her kitchen to demand to know who has purchased Brent’s children and put them in Aunt Marthy’s care. After Aunt Marthy informs him that they were purchased by their father, Dr. Flint begins to rave at her, telling her that Brent “Shall be my slave as long as I live, and when I am dead she shall be the slave of my children” (Jacobs 88). Aunt Marthy interrupts his ranting “to remind him of his own doings,” and although he looks at her “as if he would strike her to the ground,” Dr. Flint turns and leaves (88). Aunt Marthy, both because of her status as a “true woman” and her position in her own kitchen, successfully silences Dr. Flint. In fact, she is so powerful in this particular moment and in this specific space that Brent does not even recount what Aunt Marthy said that shamed Dr. Flint into leaving. Although he continues to visit Aunt Marthy hoping to ascertain Brent’s whereabouts, he never enters her kitchen again; instead, he addresses her from the yard while she stands on the porch. This scene, as well as the one with Mr. Sands, serves to demonstrate that even African American women could locate moments of power in private, domestic spaces, particularly if they were free and owned their homes, as Brent’s grandmother did. Brent, unfortunately, is neither free, nor does she have a home of her own. She is not able to locate power in private,

domestic spaces like her grandmother. She must empower herself by finding and creating interstitial spaces.

Because of the obvious role architectural spaces have in *Incidents*, much has been written about Jacobs's—and, thus, Brent's—awareness of space. Valerie Smith and Gloria Randle, in particular, have examined the ways in which both Jacobs and Brent understand, challenge, and negotiate the spaces that are available to them. Randle credits Jacobs for “her ability creatively to construct sites of temporary refuge where none exist; to discover space where there is no space; to identify, over and over again, the narrowest wedge between the rock and the hard place” (43). Smith believes Jacobs's knowledge of and ability to manipulate space “actually empowers Jacobs to redirect her own and her children's destiny” (213). Although neither Randle nor Smith identifies or defines space in the narrative in the way I do, they clearly are referring to the interstitial spaces that Jacobs uses as sites of resistance and that enable her, ultimately, to claim possession of her physical body⁸⁵ and to free her children and herself.

It is important to note that, although Jacobs's position as an enslaved woman necessarily means that she cannot publicly categorize herself, Jacobs does not use—or even recognize—her interstitial position to her advantage until she is well on her way to womanhood. Unlike Frado or even Avis Dobell, Jacobs, and by extension Brent, does not feel compelled to consider her interstitiality because her early life is relatively conflict free. Having lived with her parents until she was six and then a “kind mistress” who “had been almost like a mother to me” until she was twelve, Brent experienced a happy childhood, although it was “too happy to last” (Jacobs 11).

At fifteen, Brent enters “a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl” (Jacobs 26). Having entered adolescence, she has apparently blossomed into a beautiful young woman.⁸⁶ Her master notices her beauty, and Brent describes how he begins “to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import” (26). Flint attempts to wear down Brent's

defenses and to erode her virtue and morals. Although he possesses all the power in the relationship and could rape Brent at any moment without fear of legal or moral recourse,⁸⁷ Flint seems more interested in convincing Brent to engage willingly in a sexual relationship with him. He wants to control her—mind and body. For him to take complete pleasure in his conquest, she must agree to the relationship; moreover, she must violate freely “the pure principles [her] grandmother had instilled” in her (26). Brent endures Flint’s verbal sexual abuse for well over a year; she is able to refuse Flint, but she cannot stop his treatment of her. His treatment effectively ends her childhood and places her in an interstitial space because she no longer sees herself as wholly virtuous. Even though she maintains her physical chastity, she feels that he has succeeded in morally corrupting her mind and spirit with his verbal abuse and sexual threats. The interstitial space, in which she is both virtuous and expected to give in to her master, offers Brent only limited power as she realizes that she can only resist him for so long. She may be able to retain her virtue through ingenuity and will power,⁸⁸ but she cannot escape his verbal assaults. She is further put at risk when Mrs. Flint learns of her husband’s interest in Brent.

As Dr. Flint’s desire for Brent becomes more apparent to everyone in the Flint household, Brent also faces Mrs. Flint’s “constant suspicion and malevolence” (Jacobs 28), and Brent is aware how bitterly her mistress hates her, which Brent finds both hurtful and puzzling. After all, Mrs. Flint “possessed the key to her husband’s character before [Brent] was born” (28). In Brent’s mind, Mrs. Flint should feel some emotion for her and the other enslaved women under her husband’s control: “She might have used [her] knowledge to counsel and to screen the young and the innocent among her slaves; but for them she had no sympathy” (28). Rather than attempt to protect these young women from her lascivious husband, Mrs. Flint simply “watched her husband with unceasing vigilance” and directed all her anger and betrayal at her husband’s victims (28). Critic Jennifer Larson claims that “Mrs. Flint subscribes to the Cult of True

Womanhood, adhering closely to all elements of the standard. For this reason, she is passive in her resistance to the sexual abuse of her female slaves” (743). Larson goes on to assert that the “narrative paints the slave mistress’s submissiveness, the refusal to intervene on behalf of the slave girl, as sisterhood lost” (743). While Larson is correct that Brent feels betrayed by Mrs. Flint because she believes the bond of womanhood, regardless of their race and class positions, should connect them in some way, her assessment of Mrs. Flint as a true woman is not entirely accurate.

As Brent tells us, Mrs. Flint is not completely submissive to her husband. Brent observes many fights between Dr. and Mrs. Flint, and her presence in the house is often the cause: “every day it became more apparent that my presence was intolerable to Mrs. Flint. Angry words frequently passed between her and her husband. He had never punished me himself, and he would not allow anybody else to punish me” (Jacobs 29). From this quotation, we can surmise that Mrs. Flint has demanded that Brent either be removed from the house or that she be allowed to punish Brent. While it is apparent she does obey her husband’s orders not to beat Brent, it is also clear from the exchange of “Angry words” that she does not always do so passively. Like Mrs. Bellmont from *Our Nig*, Mrs. Flint is an obedient wife, but she also voices her displeasure at obeying orders she clearly does not agree with, although she does so knowing her husband will likely disregard her feelings and desires. Additionally, Mrs. Flint is neither domestic nor pious; indeed, much like Mrs. Bellmont, Mrs. Flint performs no domestic tasks at all. Brent describes her as “totally deficient in energy. She had not the strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were so strong that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash” (14). Mrs. Flint attends church regularly, “but partaking of the Lord’s Supper did not seem to put her in a Christian frame of mind. If dinner was not served” promptly on Sundays, she would “spit in all the kettles

and pans” once the meal was served (14). Mrs. Flint, who has every opportunity to teach Brent and the other enslaved women in her control to be true women, contradicts the model of true womanhood repeatedly throughout the narrative.

On some level, however, Brent also recognizes Mrs. Flint’s powerlessness. As a “true woman,” Mrs. Flint is meant to “accept submission, although she had not chosen it or deserved it” (Welter 54). Even if Mrs. Flint wanted to protect Brent or the other enslaved women she knew her husband abused, she had little recourse to do so. In fact, she only has slightly more agency over her life, her home, and her children than Brent has over herself. Mrs. Flint has no choice but to follow her husband’s orders, even though she is able to voice her displeasure at doing so. She is not, however, able to stop her husband from engaging in sexual relationships with his female slaves, however much she may want to. The primary power that Mrs. Flint possesses is the power she wields over her husband’s slaves, and like many other white women, she “sadistically and viciously punished” the enslaved women and their children for “the transgressions” of her husband (Omolade 10). As Omolade suggests, white women such as Mrs. Flint relied upon their limited power and

used the social relationship of supervisor of black women’s domestic labor to act out their racial superiority, their emotional frustrations, and their sexual jealousies. Black women slaves and domestic servants were useful buffers between white men and white women, pulling them together, resolving their conflicts, maintaining continuity and structure for the white family whose physical and emotional needs they fulfilled. (10)

Thus, white women, who were routinely victimized by white men, often victimized black women as a way to alleviate their own sense of powerlessness, and enslaved black women often became responsible for holding white families together by enduring the abuse of both white men

and women. By being victimized by their white mistresses, who are “angry, vengeful women” and direct their anger at innocent women who, because of their position as servants or slaves, have less power than they do (Larson 743), both Brent and Frado learn what kind of women they do not want to be from their mistresses.

For her part, Brent seems to use Mrs. Flint as a model of womanhood gone wrong. Rather than accept the conventions of womanhood that her grandmother has taught her and that Mrs. Flint is supposed to represent, Brent questions them. In fact, the narrative “seeks to overturn these conventions, to show their oppressive natures” to both black and white women and to consider the “subversion of purity and submissiveness through an analysis of agency” (Larson 741). Brent endures the Flints’ abuse for several years, successfully resisting both Flints in passive ways. But, as Omolade asserts, such passive resistance “was in violent conflict with the rage and humiliation” most enslaved women, including Brent, felt at the thought of being forced to “lie in the arms of the enslaver,” yet the black “woman could not be separated from her color” (11). Thus to survive, Brent, and women in positions similar to hers, had little choice but to give in to her enslaver or to resist passively. When Dr. Flint tells her that he is building a house for her on the edge of his property, she realizes passive resistance will not protect her forever. At that moment, she develops a plan to actively resist Dr. Flint, and the plan enables her to take control of her body and to claim ownership of her sexuality.

As soon as Brent becomes aware of Flint’s plans to build a home for her, she begins considering more active forms of resistance:

I was determined that the master, whom I so hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last in trampling his victim under his feet. I would do anything, every thing, for the sake of

defeating him. What *could* I do? I thought and thought, till I became desperate, and made a plunge into the abyss. (Jacobs 46)⁸⁹

Brent quickly comes to the conclusion that if she is to protect herself from Flint she must sacrifice the one thing about her that he finds most attractive: her chastity. She willingly begins an affair with Mr. Sands, an unmarried white man, who has previously shown some interest in her. She selects Mr. Sands because “He was an educated and eloquent gentleman” (47). He is kind and sympathetic to Brent’s current situation, and although he never claims to love her, he does seem to care for her.

What is most striking about this section of the narrative is Brent’s brutal honesty with her readers and herself. She recognizes that many of her readers will likely find her decision to engage in a sexual relationship outside of marriage objectionable, as they will surely be offended by her admission that “I knew what I did, and I did it with deliberate calculation” (Jacobs 46). Brent goes so far as to admit that she is drawn to Sands because he is interested in her: “to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave” (47). But she also reminds her readers that the act of choosing to take Sands as a lover both frees and empowers her: “It is less degrading to give ones’ self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no real control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment” (47). As Randle contends,

Consenting to a relationship with Sands is clearly a preemptive move on her part, painfully born, not of a lack of moral values, but of a fierce resolve to spare herself from the dreaded Dr. Flint’s sexual advances at any cost. While her decision is far from ideal, it does qualify as the lesser of two evils, under her severely compromised circumstances . . . But it is not only that Sands is the

lesser evil: he also represents for Brent the critical difference between passive resignation and proactive rebellion. Choosing him, in effect, allows her to make a *choice*. (49)⁹⁰

Her choice, a word that Brent pointedly does not use when referring to her relationship with Sands, is empowering, as Randle suggests. It marks the first time in the narrative that Brent has claimed complete control over herself. That is not to suggest that her decision to use her sexuality is not without problems; Brent feels she has compromised her morality and disrespected her family, especially her grandmother. The only weapon Brent has is her body; to escape Dr. Flint's advances, Brent still must objectify herself. In fact, on some level, Brent can be seen as giving into the sexual exploitation she has tried so hard to reject. Even though Sands does not own her, as a white man "he still as has the power to take her as a woman" (Omolade 11). Brent reiterates time and again, however, that "the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standards as others" (Jacobs 48). Brent's choice of Sands does enable her to carve out a space for herself "by calling upon a terrible energy borne of alienation, injury, hopelessness, and anger, surrendering all prospects of a virtuous life as her grandmother defines it" (Randle 49). Her decision to use her sexuality to protect herself from Flint grants her access to an interstitial space where she finds "some virtue in self-determination" (49). In this space, where she knows she is neither a virtuous woman nor a whore, she begins to control other aspects of her life and, ultimately, changes her destiny.

Brent soon learns that her gamble has paid off. When Dr. Flint tells her the cottage is completed and orders her to go live there, she responds, "I will never go there. In a few months I shall be a mother" (Jacobs 48). Flint is so disgusted with Brent that he orders her out of his sight, and she goes to her grandmother's house. While Brent has successfully removed herself

from Flint's clutches, she knows she has other consequences to face for her actions: her grandmother's anger and her impending motherhood.

When Brent arrives at her grandmother's house, she knows she must confess, even though she believes she had no choice but to act as she did. Once she realizes why Brent has come to her, her grandmother responds with profound anger, exclaiming "Oh Linda! has it come to this? I had rather see you dead than to see you as you now are. You are a disgrace to your dead mother . . . Go away! . . . and never come to my house, again" (Jacobs 48). Randle points out that "While the grandmother's banishment remains in effect for only a few days, it represents a psychological watershed in Brent's life" (51). Although Brent continues to rely on her grandmother for emotional support, from this moment she no longer allows her grandmother to be the guiding influence in her life. She slowly begins to realize she will have to make many more hard choices and use her interstitial existence to her advantage if she is to escape slavery and claim the freedom she so desperately desires. Unfortunately, she is about to become a mother, which she realizes further complicates every aspect of her life.

For Brent, motherhood, as many critics note, is not "a desire in itself but rather the inevitable result of her liaison with Sands" (Randle 51). As much as she loves her children, for she eventually has a son and a daughter by Sands, Brent regrets having them, both because of the shame of being an unwed mother and because they have been born into slavery and are as subject to Flint's will as she is. Her children, however, do affect Brent positively as they remind her that she must continue to find moments of power in her interstitial existence. In fact, her children serve to heighten her interstitiality as their presence encourages her to continue resisting Flint in any way she can.

At this point in the text, the interstitial spaces Brent claims and creates are almost exclusively metaphoric. She is able, however, to transform her grandmother's house into a

physical interstitial space. She manipulates Flint's displeasure with her so that she is able to live with her grandmother, removing herself and her children from his immediate control. She is still his slave and is still subject to his verbal abuse and threats, but she no longer has to fear that he will appear in her room at night, as he has done in the past. Brent also uses her relationship with Sands to her advantage, by frequently pressuring him to buy her and their children. Although she knows this move would not guarantee their freedom, she reasons that living as Sands's slave would be infinitely preferable to being Flint's. While Sands is unsuccessful in his attempts to purchase either Brent or their children, Benjamin and Ellen,⁹¹ Brent does flaunt their parentage to ensure they will remain out of Flint's control. Rather than keeping the children away from Flint, Brent often has them play outside where they will come into direct contact with him. The children's very existence constantly reminds him that she would not give into his sexual demands; in fact, each time he sees the children he becomes enraged at Brent all over again. Rather than seek revenge by selling the children, which would be well within his legal rights as their owner, Flint demands that they be kept off his property and away from him. Thus, Brent and both children live with her grandmother as soon as Flint learns of her first pregnancy until Ellen is almost four. Living with her grandmother, who is a free woman, grants Brent and her children a certain amount of freedom that she would not know if she were still living at her master's. She is able to raise her children much as she was raised, teaching them they are human beings first and slaves second. Further, at her grandmother's house, Ellen and Benjamin are sheltered from many of the horrors of slavery that are readily on display at the Flints'. Aunt Marthy's house acts as a physical and metaphoric barrier for both Brent and the children, as the borders of the property protect them from Flint and allow them to develop a sense of home. In fact, because of the relative safety that Brent enjoys at her grandmother's house, she determines

to remain a slave in order to keep her family together until she learns that she cannot protect Ellen and Ben from Flint forever.

Having continually failed in his attempts to get Brent to agree to be his lover, Dr. Flint finally determines to punish Brent by sending her to work on his son's plantation, where she will be far removed from the relative safety she enjoys at her grandmother's house. With no other options available to her, Brent resolves to go rather than become Flint's concubine. Brent makes the best of her situation; she works diligently to prepare the plantation house for her young master's new wife, and she visits Ben and Ellen, who have remained with her grandmother, whenever she can. One day a man, whom Brent only describes as "the gentleman," informs her that her "children were to be brought to the plantation to be 'broke in'" (Jacobs 77). Brent realizes immediately that she will not be able to protect her children once they are on the plantation. Removed from the safety of her grandmother's house, Brent knows Flint plans to use her children to convince her to finally become his concubine. Brent, aware she will be unable to refuse him if he threatens her children, resolves to escape, reasoning that Flint will focus all of his efforts on finding her and lose interest in the children. Her decision marks a significant shift in the narrative, both in terms of how she resists Flint and the architectural and metaphoric spaces she occupies.

Brent flees the Flint plantation the very night she learns her children are to be brought to the plantation. She calmly and methodically completes her evening tasks, ensuring that no one will have any reason to suspect anything is amiss. At midnight, Brent begins the long trek to the home of a friend, whom Brent knows will shelter her. She goes to her friend's rather than her grandmother's because she knows that Aunt Marthy "would say 'Linda, you are killing me'; and I knew that would unnerve me" (Jacobs 78). For the first time in the narrative—and, likely, in her life—she makes a decision that will affect her grandmother's life without fearing the

repercussions her grandmother will force her to endure. Brent places her desire for her own safety and freedom and for that of her children above the expectations of her grandmother. From this point in the narrative, Brent begins to consider her needs and those of her children before anyone else's.

For the next several months, Brent hides in various locations: her friend's house,⁹² the swamp,⁹³ and the attic of a sympathetic slaveholder. While none of these spaces bring her closer to actual freedom, each serves to empower Brent in some way. While in the first two spaces, Brent realizes the full extent of her desire for freedom and of Flint's obsession with her. In these two spaces, Brent has the room and the time to consider fully the implications of her actions. She knows she has acted in a way that will alter her life, as well as the lives of her children and her immediate family, forever. Given the intensity of Flint's search for her, which Brent admits she had not anticipated, Brent feels certain that she made the right decision. She slowly begins to grasp that Flint would never have given her up, and this knowledge strengthens her resolve to escape slavery at any cost. When she leaves her friend's home after several weeks, Brent moves to a location that is clearly interstitial, and as such, it enables her to take further control of her life.

From her friend's house, Brent is taken to the home of a "kind lady," who is "unlike the majority of slaveholder's wives" (Jacobs 81). Brent's grandmother sought her help because she is known throughout the community as being kind and honest to her own slaves. She readily agrees to harbor Brent until she can make her way to the North. Brent moves from one hiding space to another without knowing where she is going, and although she writes "I did not like to move thus blindfolded," she also admits "I had no choice" (81). Once she arrives at her new hiding place, Brent is led "upstairs to a small room" over the mistress's bedroom (81). She occupies the attic space for several months, and while there, she is completely dependent upon

her “benefactress” and her slave Betty, the only other person in the house to know of Brent’s presence (82). As Valerie Smith contends in her essay “‘Loopholes of Retreat’: Architecture and Ideology in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,” Brent is largely dependent upon others as she

describes her escape as a progression from one small space to another. . . to underscore her helplessness and vulnerability, she indicates that although she ran alone to her first friend’s house, she left each of her hiding places only with the aid of someone else. In fact, when she goes to her second and third hiding places, she is entirely at the mercy of her companion, for she is kept entirely ignorant of her destination. (215)

In spite of her dependence on others and the isolation she experiences in these confined spaces, Brent comes to think of herself as free; in fact, she marks her freedom not when she finally lands on free soil, but when she goes into hiding. These spaces, as Smith argues, render Brent emotionally and “spiritually independent of her master” (212). Further, her sense of independence and freedom is only heightened when she learns that Flint has sold her brother and her children to a slave trader who was working for Sands. As a direct result of this news, Brent begins to realize just how powerful interstitial spaces can be and how much agency she can claim over herself and her children in these spaces.⁹⁴

Although she is physically imprisoned in these spaces,⁹⁵ Brent’s sense of empowerment continues to grow, especially in her space over her benefactress’s bedroom. From the small window in the tiny attic space, Brent “command[s] a view of the street through which Dr. Flint passed to his office” (Jacobs 82). By lying atop a stack of feather beds, Brent can “lie perfectly concealed” and watch Flint’s daily activities (82). In an interesting reversal of roles, Brent now wields some power in her relationship with Flint as she has Flint under her constant surveillance,

much as he once had her under his. Brent would not possess any power over Flint if she had fled to the North rather than going into hiding. While she would be physically free, she would have no knowledge of her children, of her extended family, or of Dr. Flint's whereabouts and intentions toward her or her children. Thus, this particular space is interstitial and not just because of its hard to get to location;⁹⁶ it is interstitial because it keeps Brent's whereabouts private while allowing her to witness the goings-on of the community and Flint's public life. Brent, despite her private location, is still able to participate in the public sphere as she uses her knowledge of Flint to manipulate him. In fact, Brent confesses to experiencing "a gleam of satisfaction when I saw him. Thus far I had outwitted him, and I triumphed over it. Who can blame slaves for being cunning . . . It is the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of their tyrants" (82). Her time in this space, as well as the sense of agency and independence she begins to develop while there, prepares her for the seven years she spends in the garret over her grandmother's shed—an interstitial location that truly enables Brent to claim possession of herself. After several months under Betty's care, Brent is forced to leave her attic hiding space for fear the other members of the house have discovered her presence.⁹⁷ She is taken from the small attic to the seven by nine foot garret, which makes the tiny attic seem spacious and luxurious in comparison.

Brent describes the garret as "stifling; the darkness total. A bed had been spread on the floor. I could sleep quite comfortably on one side; but the slope was so sudden that I could not turn on the other without hitting the roof" (Jacobs 92). Brent's only companions in the garret are the rats and mice who run over her while she sleeps, and the spaces deprives her of both light and air. While Brent makes it clear that this is not a space she would have chosen to inhabit under ordinary circumstances, she admits that "I would have chosen [life in the garret], rather than my lot as a slave" (92). That Brent prefers life in the garret—where she is subjected to

severe temperature changes, sensory deprivation,⁹⁸ intense loneliness, and profound physical pain—proves how intolerable she found life as Flint’s slave. In fact, Brent admits that her life was much easier than those of many other enslaved individuals:

I was never cruelly overworked; I was never lacerated with the whip from head to foot; I was never so beaten and bruised that I could not turn from one side to the other; I never had my heel-strings cut to prevent me from running away; I was never chained to a log and forced to drag it about, while I toiled in the fields from morning till night; I was never branded with a hot iron, or torn by blood hounds. On the contrary, I had always been kindly treated, and tenderly cared for, until I came into the hands of Dr. Flint. I had never wished for freedom until then. (92)

In the garret, Brent feels the same sense of freedom she experienced in the previous spaces she occupied. In fact, she quickly comes to terms with the spatial limitations of the garret, which cause significant long-term effects to Brent’s physical body.⁹⁹ She begins to value the interstitial space for the many freedoms it offers her—mainly the ability to direct the outcome of her life on her own terms.

Unlike Wilson’s Frado, who only seems to recognize spaces as interstitial after she had used them as sites of resistance, Brent immediately sees the garret as an interstitial space and acknowledges the benefits it has to offer her. In fact, the garret shelter, “a sphere that exists beyond the pall, constitutes the most significant . . . space that Brent has yet negotiated” (Randle 52). Her awareness of the interstitial qualities of the space is clear given that she describes it as “the loophole of retreat” (Jacobs 92).¹⁰⁰ Naming it a “loophole” highlights the ambiguous nature of the garret. As I stated earlier in this section, the garret is largely ignored as a viable hiding place because of its size and its location. Brent’s grandmother does not even use it as a storage

space because anything stored there could not be effectively protected from the elements. The garret has only ever been used to hide Brent, as evidenced by the fact that her Uncle Philip has to build a trap-door in the ceiling of the shed before Brent can even enter the space (92). As far as the entire community is concerned, the garret does not exist at all—thus, it adheres to the definition of an interstitial space as it is neither one thing nor another, and because of its ambiguous nature, it can be adapted to fit Brent’s needs. For Brent, “the loophole of retreat” is empowering precisely because it is interstitial. So long as she occupies a space that the community in general and Dr. Flint in particular believes does not exist, she cannot exist within the confines of the community. Indeed, the entire community believes Brent has fled North Carolina for Boston or New York. Her alleged absence from the community combined with her actual presence there places Brent in a position of power over Flint that she would not have experienced had she not remained hidden in the garret for so long.

The garret can further be seen as an interstitial space because, so long as she occupies the garret, Brent can see, but she cannot be seen. The invisibility of her position¹⁰¹ only serves to add to the growing sense of agency she experiences while in the garret. Brent’s garret is startlingly similar to Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, which Michel Foucault analyzed in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). Like the Panopticon, Brent’s garret is a physical prison, but her prison resembles the tower, where the guards keep watch on the prisoners more than the cells that the prisoners occupy. From her garret position, Brent is able to keep watch on much of the community and, most importantly, to watch Dr. Flint as he comes and goes from his office throughout the day. He is, then, subject to Brent’s constant surveillance, much like the inmates are subject to the constant gaze of the guards in the tower. Indeed, Brent’s decision to call the unusable space above her grandmother’s storage shed a garret even highlights her ability to watch over the community while she is in this space. Although a garret is defined most often as

“a room on the uppermost floor of a house” or as “an apartment formed either partially or wholly within the roof,” a garret was “a watch-tower” or “a turret projecting from the top of a tower or from the parapet of a fortification” (*OED Online*).¹⁰² Like the guards in the Panopticon, Brent is well aware that her position within the garret affords her a great deal of control over Flint. The inmates are controlled, according to Foucault, by a power that is both “visible and unverifiable” (Foucault 201). In the Panopticon, the power is visible because the inmate is constantly aware of “the central tower from which he is spied upon,” but the power is unverifiable because, given the architectural placement of the tower above the cells, the inmate is never certain that “he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must” believe that he is always being watched (200). The Panopticon becomes “a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring [of the cells] one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen” (202). Brent’s position in the garret is like that of the guards in the tower, but with one obvious exception: her power is invisible *and* unverifiable. Brent’s power is invisible because neither Flint nor anyone else who has previously controlled Brent is aware that she is living in the garret space; her power is unverifiable because Flint does not realize he is being watched, but he eventually understands that Brent still had knowledge of the community and of his travels to New York and Boston to look for her (Jacobs 103). The invisibility of her position renders the unverifiable nature of her power doubly detrimental to Flint. Simply put, Brent knows much more about Flint during the seven years she is in the garret than he does about her. She is able to use her knowledge of Flint to protect herself and her children and to manipulate Flint into believing that she has long since fled the North Carolina community and now resides somewhere in the North.

After several years in the garret, Brent is forced to come to terms with the reality that Flint has not given up his search for her. He continually questions her grandmother about Brent’s

whereabouts and tells Aunt Marthy that if Brent were to “voluntarily surrender myself” that “I could be purchased by my relatives, or anyone who wished to buy me” (Jacobs 101).

Fortunately, both Brent and her grandmother are familiar enough with Flint’s character to see these statements as anything other than blatant lies to encourage Brent to return to the South. To combat Flint’s lies, Brent quickly resolves to “match my cunning against his cunning” and use her knowledge of Flint’s manipulations to her advantage by writing him letters confirming that she is living in the North (102).

Brent quickly develops an elaborate plan, which includes having a friend, Peter, who travels to New York often mail the letters from that city, to write to Flint. She writes two letters, one to her grandmother, which she knows Flint will manage to intercept, and one to Flint. In her letter to Flint, she

reminded him how he, a gray-headed man, had treated a helpless child, who had been placed in his power, and what years of misery he had brought upon her. To my grandmother, I expressed a wish to have my children sent to me at the north . . . I asked her to direct her answer to a certain street in Boston, as I did not live in New York, though I went there sometimes. (Jacobs 101-2)

The letters have the desired affect as Flint visits Aunt Marthy immediately upon receiving them. He seems to believe every word Brent has written and tells her grandmother that he plans to look for her immediately. Although his announcement frightens Aunt Marthy, Brent considers it “as good as a comedy” (103). With Flint’s reaction, Brent confirms that their roles have indeed reversed. She may still be physically limited to the garret, but she is in a position to control Flint and his perception of her. Thus, Brent is able to maintain her invisible and unverified power so long as she occupies the interstitial space of the garret. Once Brent chooses to leave the garret

and end her period of physical confinement, however, she actually sacrifices much of the control she has over Flint.

Brent eventually leaves the garret behind to start a new life in the North. That she only does so because her grandmother believes she is in immediate danger of being discovered¹⁰³ demonstrates how attached she is to both the garret and the power its interstitiality affords her. The moment she steps out of the garret and her grandmother's house, Brent must come to terms with the reality that she has left behind the relative safety and the limited power she enjoyed. As she travels to the North by hiding on a ship, she feels the sense of vulnerability and powerlessness that constantly haunted her when she was under Flint's control return. Although she is accustomed to depending on others—after all, she could not have survived in the garret without the help of her family and trusted friends—she is not used to feeling so exposed or dependent upon people she has never met. In fact, Brent describes herself as “completely in [the power]” of the captain and the sailors, a feeling she is clearly uncomfortable with (Jacobs 124). Brent's discomfort does not end when she finds herself standing on free soil for the first time in her life only a few days later. Her fear and anticipation is heightened when she is told by Rev. Jeremiah Dunham, the minister of a local church who has agreed to let Brent stay with him and his family while she is in Philadelphia, not to be too forthright when answering questions about her life. He tells her, “Your straight-forward answers do you credit; but don't answer every body so openly. It might give some heartless people a pretext for treating you with contempt” (127). Thus, Brent realizes that, although she is now free from slavery, Flint, and the confines of the garret, she must still contend with harsh treatment because of her race and her position as an unwed mother.

The remainder of the narrative details Brent's move to New York, her attempts to find work with an employer she can trust, her reunion with her daughter,¹⁰⁴ and her relationship with

her employer Mrs. Bruce. It is, in fact, through Mrs. Bruce's generosity that Brent finally secures her official freedom. Mrs. Bruce, whom Brent describes as "exceedingly kind" and a "true and sympathizing friend" (Jacobs 151, 147), purchases Brent's freedom to put an end to the Flint's constant attempts to return her to slavery.¹⁰⁵ The last event Brent recounts is seeing her "bill of sale" (Jacobs 155). She ends the narrative recounting the myriad of emotions, including joy, relief, incredulity, and anger, she experiences upon realizing that she is, indeed, legally free. That *Incidents* ends somewhat abruptly at this point in Brent's life signals, on some level, that Harriet Jacobs no longer had any need for the persona that she had so carefully constructed and that added to the interstitial nature of her text, thus enabling Jacobs to recount events and to express feelings she may have preferred to keep private.

Through Brent, Jacobs is able to separate herself, both physically and emotionally, from the very personal elements of her narrative. As Gillian Brown asserts, this separation "tells the story of the relation between the freed black and her formerly enslaved self" (43). Jacobs decision to divide her self into two parts, the freed woman and the formerly enslaved woman casts the narrative itself as an interstitial space in which the persona of Brent allows Jacobs to accomplish goals that are in direct opposition to the public and private norms that she, as a woman, is expected to uphold. It is, for example, entirely inappropriate for Jacobs to discuss either the sexual abuse she endures or the sexual relationship she chooses to enter into. But, by writing as Brent, Jacobs herself has not acted inappropriately; further, using Brent allows Jacobs to critique the ideologies that dictate that she cannot discuss these facts about her life publicly. By writing as Brent—indeed, by writing at all—Jacobs transforms her narrative into an interstitial space in which she claims a space of her own and openly engages in public debates surrounding slavery and womanhood.

Jacobs concludes her narrative by again reminding her readers that her life has not followed the same trajectory as theirs: “Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way, with marriage” (Jacobs 156). Carolyn Sorsio suggests that Brent includes this statement to teach “her readers not to presume too much about the story of her life, about how it unfolds and how it should end” (110). After all, the white women of the North, to whom Jacobs has directed her narrative, could easily assume that now that Jacobs has secured her and her children’s freedom her life will mimic theirs. But, as Jacobs reminds them, freedom guarantees her few, if any, privileges, and it does certainly does not ensure that she will ever possess one of the things she truly desires: a home of her own. Anne Bradford Warner points out that home is a fundamental concern of Jacobs throughout her narrative. Jacobs “establishes the primacy of housekeeping and of the home, the first as a measure of character and the second as a lifelong goal” (36). Warner’s assessment that Jacobs values what a home *is meant to be* is certainly correct. Jacobs’s description of her life before she became a part of the Flints’ household and after she fled her place there emphasize her belief that “a household that sustains its members shapes human happiness” (36). Jacobs does acknowledge the “sacredness of a home, especially the sacredness of a home protected by Law,” but she also reminds her readers that such sacredness does not extend to the homes of enslaved and formerly enslaved individuals (Jacobs 36). With the declaration “The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble. I still long it for my children’s sake far more than for my own” (156), Jacobs seeks to reiterate one final time that the promises of domesticity—namely empowerment through marriage, the sacredness of a home, and the right to educate her children as she wishes—remain unavailable to her. Even as Jacobs makes this statement to remind her readers of the vast social and economic divides that separate white and black women, she also expresses a sincere desire for her own home, believing

that a home “represents a refuge, not only from social conventions, but also from the social obligation[s]” (Kaplan 280-1).

For Jacobs, home seems to represent freedom. Indeed, Carla Kaplan asserts that the freedom of a home signifies “freedom as a social escape, counterposing idyllic isolation to the social world that ‘bind’ her and concretizing that line of liberal ideology which understands the individual’s freedom as autonomy, as freedom *from*” (281)¹⁰⁶. Following Kaplan’s argument, then, Jacobs cannot be completely free from the very domestic ideologies, which are explicitly racist and classist, she is critiquing until she is able to escape those ideologies by inhabiting a space of her own. While Jacobs cannot fully escape these conventions, she does at least transgress them by creating a metaphoric space for herself that mimics the freedom a physical home could offer her: the interstitial space of her narrative.

I define Jacobs’s narrative as an interstitial space for much the same reason I define her garret as such: her narrative is an in-between location, arguably more public than private, in which she is able to discuss private matters, such as motherhood, sexuality, and abuse, in a public forum. Addressing these issues in a highly public context, ironically, grants Jacobs a certain amount of freedom, “the individual’s freedom in terms of rights: [the] freedom *to*” (Kaplan 281). Whereas a physical home, be it an entire house or merely a room she rented rather than a room she occupied in her employer’s home, would ensure Jacobs “freedom from” the judgmental eye of American society (at least when she was inside the home), she can claim the “freedom to” share her story on her own terms and to offer her own opinion on slavery, domesticity, and womanhood in the metaphoric home that she creates by writing her narrative.

Jacobs succeeds, at least in part, in claiming her narrative as a home when she intentionally casts it as an interstitial space. She does this by combining issues of public and private, by reminding her readers that the neat divisions that form the very foundations of their

lives simply do not exist, not for them and certainly not for formerly enslaved women. As Jacobs details in her narrative, she lives with one foot in the public sphere—she is, after all, a human commodity who is a part of America’s mercantile system—and one in the private sphere. By calling attention to the fluidity that exists between the spheres, Jacobs openly questions the nature of the spheres and the domestic structure that is meant to keep the spheres bifurcated in the first place. Jacobs directly challenges the very ideologies that value Mrs. Flint’s role as a wife and mother while simultaneously preventing her from legally marrying the man she loved¹⁰⁷ and forcing her to engage in a sexual relationship out of marriage in order to claim any autonomy over her physical self. That Jacobs offers her critique through her narrative, in which she often values the very systems she believes have limited her, highlights her own interstitial existence and her need to create her narrative as an interstitial space.

Like Harriet Wilson, Jacobs lives an interstitial life, although her clearly defined status as an enslaved woman makes her life seem less interstitial than Wilson’s. Jacobs’s life is interstitial because she is trying to live up to a standard of womanhood that even she does not believe applies to her. As she tells her readers, “in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standards as others” (Jacobs 48). The interstitial nature of Jacobs’s life does not end when she finally escapes the physical reality of slavery, even after she has spent seven years in hiding. In fact, Jacobs intentionally “contrasted both her past life as a slave and her present condition, in which the selling of her labor was a prime necessity, with the social circumstances of her readership” (Carby 47). As Hazel Carby suggests, Jacobs has secured a measure of privacy in freedom that she had never known as a slave, but in order to support herself and her children, she had to continue working as a domestic servant in the public sphere, which negates much of the privacy she had seemingly found through freedom. Jacobs chooses to publicly share her very private story in order to aid

the “two millions of women at the South, suffering what I suffered,” further rendering her life interstitial (Jacobs 5). Jacobs makes the most of her interstitial life and the spaces she occupies by using it to her advantage, and she claims that advantage primarily by writing.

Jacobs, much like Wilson before her and, to some degree, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Edith Wharton after her, contributes to the public dialogue on domesticity, feminine spheres, and womanhood by writing. The very acts of writing and publishing her life story for public consumption enable Jacobs to shed the roles of silent, submissive slave and obedient, unobtrusive servant and openly embrace the role of autonomous, independent woman. By writing and willingly sharing so many intimate details of her life, Jacobs does risk losing her audience, a fact she recognizes when she asks her readers to forgive her many sins: “Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave . . . I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day” (Jacobs 48). Even as she asks her readers to forgive her transgressions, Jacobs also refuses to be subservient to them; after all, they, who have never endured a day as a slave, have no right to judge her. In the interstitial space she creates by writing her narrative, Jacobs is finally able to shed the public role she has maintained for so long and to express her views, albeit often in coded ways, on slavery, feminine spaces, and womanhood. She repeatedly points out the dehumanizing nature of slavery and argues that slavery negatively affects everyone who is remotely influenced by it. She further contends that the so-called feminine or private sphere is neither essentially feminine nor private as women, regardless of race or class, repeatedly cross the boundaries of this sphere to empower themselves in various ways. Finally, much as Wilson does in *Our Nig*, Jacobs invalidates the notion of true womanhood, arguing that the true woman is an impossible ideal for women of any race, class, or geographic location to uphold.

Ultimately both Harriet Wilson and Harriet Jacobs achieve the varied goals of their narratives. Wilson succeeds in sharing her story and in bringing the daily hardships of free blacks living in the North to the attention of the reading public, even if she is unable to earn enough from her narrative to improve her financial situation. Similarly, Jacobs manages to raise awareness of the intense sexual abuse that most, if not all, enslaved women dealt with routinely. Both women successfully critique the confines of the domestic sphere, which they found as limiting and as oppressive as the physical enslavement they each endured. Both attain their goals, as do Phelps and Wharton, who is the focus of section 4, by creating and claiming interstitial spaces. Wilson and Jacobs see interstitial spaces as both essential and temporary. They use these spaces, whether they are architectural locations or metaphorical spaces, as sites of resistance and empowerment. While each hopes, ultimately, that she will be able to leave such spaces behind for a more conventional life—one in which they are able to put the needs of their children and themselves before the need to work to survive—they recognize that this is unlikely to happen for them or many other black women in their lifetimes.

4. “AND, BESIDES WHAT WAS THERE TO GO HOME TO?”: IDENTITY, HOME, AND
INTERSTITIAL SPACES IN EDITH WHARTON’S *THE HOUSE OF MIRTH*

[Lawrence] Selden paused in surprise. In the afternoon rush of the Grand Central Station his eyes had been refreshed by the sight of Miss Lily Bart.

It was a Monday in early September, and he was returning to his work from a hurried dip in the country; but what was Miss Bart doing in town at that season? If she had appeared to be catching a train, he might have inferred that he had come on her in the act of transition between one and another of the country houses which disputed her presence after the close of the Newport season; but her desultory air perplexed him. She stood apart from the crowd, letting it drift by her to the platform or the street, and wearing an air of irresolution which might, as he surmised, be the mask of a very definite purpose.

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

Edith Wharton’s first novel, *The House of Mirth* (1905), opens with the two main characters, Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden, in Grand Central Station. Selden, much like the other busy New Yorkers in the station, is simply passing through, having just returned to the city from a brief sojourn in the country. For Selden, Grand Central is a location that one spends little time in. It is, as Annette Benert describes it, the “grandiose gateway” into and out of New York (*AI* 117), but it is not an inviting location where a person wants to linger. Lily, however, seems to connect with the transitional nature of the cavernous train station in a way that Selden and the other New Yorkers with whom she shares the space do not. Indeed, as she “stands apart from the crowd, letting it drift by her to the platform or the street,” Lily manages to transform the highly public lobby into her own private waiting room (*HM* 5). In fact, the vastness of the station enables Lily to be in full view of everyone in the lobby, yet she is also able to maintain her privacy. With the novel’s opening scene Wharton highlights both the presence of interstitial spaces and her protagonist’s preference for such spaces. Further, Wharton suggests that Lily seemingly belongs in interstitial spaces and emphasizes the interstitial nature of Lily’s life.

As Selden observes, Lily appears to be lost and uncertain, as the crowd in the terminal moves around her and she just stands still. Her “air of irresolution” is, in fact, “the mask of a very definite purpose” (*HM* 5). Selden correctly surmises that Lily is waiting: she is waiting for

someone, anyone, to help her occupy her time until the next train leaves. Not only is Lily in a transitional location, but she is quite literally in transition herself, having just left Tuxedo Park to travel to Rhinebeck.¹⁰⁸ Further, Lily is neither rushing to catch a train, nor leaving the station; she is neither purchasing tickets, nor organizing her luggage; she is neither waiting to meet someone, nor has she just said good-bye to her traveling companion. Lily is quite simply waiting. She willingly positions herself in a transitional space as she is in transition between locations, knowing that by doing so she is quite likely to meet someone who will help her occupy her time, if she waits long enough. By waiting, Lily both chooses and leaves to someone else the choice as to how she will spend her time until she can catch another train to Rhinebeck. She appears to make no decisions, seemingly allowing herself to be swept away by circumstances, but by waiting, Lily makes a very clear choice—to allow another person to direct the outcome of her life for her.

The Lily that Wharton introduces at the beginning of the novel is not only standing in Grand Central Station, a location “synonymous with power, commodities, wealth, and mobility” (Balkun 72); Lily is also standing at a metaphoric crossroads between public and private life, which is emphasized by the centrality and the transitional nature of the space. She is at a point in her life when she knows she must choose a definite path as she is becoming tired of wandering through life and society is “getting tired of [her]” (*HM* 10). Lily realizes that she has two socially acceptable options: to marry a rich man, which she has been trained to do, or to support herself, an act she is wholly unprepared to consider. As Mary McAleer Balkun asserts, this moment in Grand Central is “a pivotal [one] for Lily; not only is she poised between social engagements and destinations, but she is also beginning to realize that she is trapped between society’s expectations (that she will marry like everyone else) and her desire for . . . self-fulfillment” (73). Although Lily does recognize that she must, somehow, come to terms with society’s expectations and her own desires if she is to solidify her position in the New York social circle in which she has spent her entire life, she is seemingly incapable of deciding for herself. Thus, Lily often allows others

to decide her fate for her rather than assert her own needs and desires. Wharton demonstrates Lily's preference for permitting others to direct her fate by showing her waiting in the novel's opening scene.

Lily's decision to wait in such a public location rather than leave the station on her own and find some way to occupy her time is significant for several reasons. Lily waits patiently in the lobby of the bustling train station primarily because she has nothing else to do. Having "missed the three-fifteen train," she must wait "till half-past five" to catch the next one (*HM* 6). With her aunt's home closed for the season and most of her friends out of town, Lily has few options available to her. She even admits to Selden, "I don't know what to do with myself" (6). While Lily's posture, her location within Grand Central, and her exchange with Selden all suggest she is passively waiting, Lily is actually waiting as actively as a person can. Indeed, Wharton emphasizes how active Lily is in this scene. She comes "forward smiling, eager almost, in her resolve to intercept [Selden]" (5); she glances "plaintively about the station" in search of other possible companions (6); and she forthrightly tells Selden, "do take me somewhere for a breath of fresh air" (6). For his part, Selden also seems to recognize that waiting is an activity for Lily as he observes when he first sees her "that if she did not wish to be seen she would contrive to elude him" (5). Waiting is an occupation for Lily. After all, she waits because she has been trained to. As a virtually penniless woman without parents or a husband, Lily must conform to other's perceptions of her to succeed in life. By appearing to wait patiently, Lily can observe her surroundings and determine how to respond to any given situation. She is, therefore, always prepared to make the most of any situation in which she finds herself. The activity of waiting also allows her to employ one of her few powers—the power to attract the attention of those around her. "Lily relishes her existence in the public eyes" (Moddelmog 345), and her ability to manipulate her image to meet the needs of her companions and her environment has enabled her survive the decade since her debut in society without marrying. Finally, and most importantly for the purposes of my argument, waiting emphasizes that Lily exists in an in-between state, in a

series of interstitial spaces, both architectural and metaphorical, which she is simultaneously completely aware of and unable to escape.

In this section, I explore Lily's desire to escape her interstitial existence, to possess a home of her own, and to define herself according to her own terms rather than those set by her circumstances, including her class and gender. I begin by examining Lily and Wharton's conception of interstitial spaces against those of Harriet Wilson, Harriet Jacobs, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. I then consider how Wharton defined public and private spaces as well as Lily's access to such spaces, focusing on her preoccupation with home and her inability to reconcile desire for independence with need for comfort. Finally, I examine the various interstitial spaces Lily occupies within the novel, arguing that Lily's interstitial existence is largely due to the fact that she has no space of her own.

Much like Wilson's protagonist Frado and Jacobs's autobiographical persona Linda Brent (and even Wilson and Jacobs themselves), Lily lives her entire adult life in interstitial spaces because her life cannot be easily classified. Lily is neither rich, nor poor; she is neither wholly dependent upon others, nor wholly self-sufficient; she is neither homeless, nor does she possess a home, or even a space, of her own; and finally, Lily's position as an unmarried woman also relegates her to interstitial spaces as she is no longer a debutante, nor yet an old maid. While her position as a white woman living in upper-middle class New York society clearly affords her numerous material privileges that neither Frado nor Brent ever experience, the metaphoric and spatial circumstances of Lily's life are not vastly different from theirs. Like Frado and Brent, Lily has no home, no space of her own; like them, she must adapt herself to the needs of those around her to survive; and like them, she lives in a perpetual state of limbo, as the circumstances of her life can change according to the whims of society. In fact, she is constantly traveling from her aunt's home in the city to her friends' country estates and back to the city, seemingly in search of a husband. Yet Lily rarely stays in one place long enough to become acquainted with herself, let alone to meet a man who is marriage material. Despite their positions as an African

American indentured servant and an enslaved woman, Frado and Brent, and, thus Wilson and Jacobs, spend most of their lives in a single location, which enables them to develop a connection both to the space that they occupy and the people around them. Lily, however, has no such connection to any one location, and moreover, she lacks any knowledge of a home. While Frado and Brent may not have homes of their owns, they have enough experience living in homes to understand what it means to have a home—or not to have one. Their connection to certain places coupled with their understanding of home¹⁰⁹ contributes to Frado and Brent's ability to claim some space, however small, as their own and to control, eventually, their own destinies; Lily, however, repeatedly fails to do either. In fact, Lily depends on others to amuse her, to clothe and feed her, to give her money, to advise her, and even to scold her when she makes poor decisions.

Throughout the novel, Wharton repeatedly emphasizes Lily's dependence on others, arguing that her dependence heightens the interstitiality of Lily's life. Indeed, as an impoverished woman living as a member of the upper-middle class, Lily continually moves from one house party to the next, from one guest room to another, staying with those who will allow her to be part of their society and help her maintain the lifestyle to which she is accustomed and has been raised into. Lily is constantly on the move in order to keep up her lifestyle, and her perpetual motion renders her life much less stable than Frado's and Brent's, especially as it limits her ability to connect with any one space or to use the interstitial spaces she inhabits to empower herself. By the time both Frado and Brent—and by extension, Wilson and Jacobs—are Lily's age, they have managed to achieve what Lily repeatedly fails to do: spaces of their own. Also Wilson and Jacobs are only able to claim spaces of their own through writing an autobiographical novel and a slave narrative, respectively, they are able, nevertheless, to create locations in which they can claim their voices and assert their own identities. Lily, unlike Wilson and Jacobs's (or their fictionalized counterparts) before her, remains largely unable to negotiate the interstitial nature of her life in any meaningful way. That Lily is unable to utilize any of the interstitial spaces she occupies to her advantage—at least not for any extended period of time—foreshadows her

eventual failure. Lily is able to use her interstitiality to capture isolated moments of power, but she cannot use her power to direct her own destiny, as Wilson and Jacobs do, to achieve what she really wants: a home of her own and the ability to direct the outcome of her own life. At this point, it is important to note that Wharton views interstitial spaces somewhat differently than the other authors discussed.

As I stated previously, Wilson and Jacobs both view interstitial spaces, whether they are actual, physical locations or metaphoric ones, as sites of empowerment and resistance. Both describe their fictionalized counterparts as transforming key locations into interstitial spaces, in which they are able to claim ownership over their bodies, their voices, and their identities, even if these spaces they inhabit only enable them to do so temporarily. For Frado, these spaces include the Bellmonts' barn, the outbuilding, and the woodpile, each of which falls beyond the control Mrs. Bellmont exercises over the private, domestic spaces of her home. For Brent, the garret space she occupies for seven years becomes the primary interstitial space she claims to empower herself and direct her own future. For both Wilson and Jacobs, their narratives become interstitial spaces, as they transform their texts into metaphoric locations where they can express their feelings on slavery, servitude, motherhood, and home. Wilson and Jacobs both envision interstitial spaces as essential but temporary locations that African American women must exploit if they are to empower themselves and to defy the limitations forced upon them by slavery, racism, and definitions of womanhood.

In contrast, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps sees interstitial spaces as more permanent. She argues that not all women who want lives that go beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother will be able to change their futures simply by locating and claiming interstitial spaces as their own. Ideally, women who knowingly inhabit interstitial spaces do so as a way to assert power over themselves and their futures, and they are able, thus, to wield their power beyond interstitial spaces and maintain their sense of power in spaces from which they are typically excluded. Phelps maintains, however, that few women of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries

are able to negotiate the move from interstitial spaces to other types of spaces successfully.

Phelps's own Avis Dobell of *The Story of Avis* is an example of such a woman. Avis feels most empowered when she is in outdoor settings or her studio, spaces that Phelps clearly envisions as interstitial. When Avis, who wants to be a professional artist, chooses a more traditional path, she knowingly moves away from the interstitial spaces that have brought her such comfort and creative freedom, and she is unable to translate the power she felt in these spaces to the more domestic spaces of the home, where she now spends most of her time. As a result of moving beyond interstitial spaces, Avis sacrifices much of who she is. Women like Avis, then, can only develop completely on their own terms if they remain in interstitial spaces.

Like Phelps, Wharton views interstitial spaces empowering. She also argues that not all women are able to negotiate the divide between interstitial spaces and ones that are defined more specifically as either public or private, masculine or feminine. Wharton further contends that some women, particularly women such as Lily Bart who have come to view themselves as largely powerless to direct the outcome of their lives, actually become victims to the very interstitial spaces others find so empowering. As a single woman living among New York's social elite, Lily is automatically limited to interstitial spaces, as she has no space, either public or private, to call her own. Lily is the most powerful, as Benert suggests, in "stair[ways], thresholds, and doorways," spaces which connect "private and public life" (AI 121). These spaces reflect the interstitial nature of Lily's life as they are transitional locations that can be seen as private but also put anyone who inhabits them on display. Lily does wield some power by virtue of her interstitial existence—she is able to manipulate the boundaries of these spaces and people's perceptions of her to secure her future either through marriage or inheritance. Her desire for independence, however, repeatedly interferes with her willingness to conform to others' view of her, which, in turn, prolongs her interstitiality. Lily cannot translate the power she experiences in interstitial spaces to more clearly defined spaces, particularly ones designated as private, because she is unwilling to reconcile her desire for autonomy with her need for luxury and comfort. Lily

fails, then, because she is unable to use the power she gains while in interstitial spaces to change the course of her life. Unlike Avis, Frado, or Linda Brent, each of whom chooses, at least to some degree, the outcome of her own life, Lily is wholly unable to decide, and ultimately, her life is directed by her peers and the types of spaces she inhabits. Lily is, thus, “at the mercy of a society that insists upon intertwining conventional gender roles with particular spaces” (Somers 135). Renée Somers contends that Lily’s “inability to secure a space of her own and the fact that she haphazardly occupies settings” constructed as public “contribute to her downfall” (Somers 135). While Somers correctly surmises that Lily’s constant presence in public spaces hastens her failure, Somers seemingly ignores the fact that Lily eschews private spaces largely because, as an unmarried woman with no means of supporting herself, they are unavailable to her. Lily, then, does not necessarily prefer public spaces; she inhabits them because they are the ones most readily available to her. With Lily, Wharton argues that women who do not have spaces of their own must be willing to either take control of their own lives by effectively negotiating the boundaries of the interstitial spaces that are available to them or to accept the path laid out for them by society. Before beginning my analysis of the novel and the various spaces Lily inhabits, I want to first emphasize that Wharton also views public and private somewhat differently than the other others I have discussed.

The notions of public and private had changed considerably between 1877, the year Phelps published *The Story of Avis*, and 1905, when *The House of Mirth* first appeared. Phelps, Wilson, and Jacobs are, for the most part, relying upon definitions of the public and private spheres as they were developed by mid-nineteenth century domestic ideologues and reformers. For them, the private sphere was, in the simplest terms, the dominion of women, as “women derived their power from” their roles within their homes (Hayden 55). Each of these authors responded, in some way, to what Dolores Hayden described as “the physical and social separation of the population into the female-dominated sphere of home life . . . and the male-dominated spheres of aggressive competition” (56). Phelps responded by asserting that not all women were

fulfilled intellectually and creatively by their roles within the domestic sphere, while Jacobs and Wilson contended that such strict demarcations between the public and private spheres were largely imagined and that the definitions of the two spheres only accounted for middle- and upper-class white women, thereby excluding African American women, working-class women, and immigrant women. By 1905, conversations of the public and private spheres had shifted to reflect the increasingly urbanized and consumer-oriented American culture. As a result, women, who had been previously expected to exert their “control over all aspects of domesticity” (55), found their power extending beyond the physical and metaphorical confines of the home as they were expected to participate in the market economy and urban landscape, both as consumers and arbiters of social mores.

Critic Maureen Montgomery posits that the home, and by extension women’s roles within the home, “was overwhelmed by the effects of urban expansion and technological innovation. As the [nineteenth] century drew to a close, the whole style of social life began to change in response to an emerging culture of consumer capitalism and as a result of the opening up of public space” (40). Women, especially middle- and upper-class women, were expected to participate in this consumer culture on behalf of their husbands; rather than only wielding their power in the home, women had to participate in the market economy by entering the public world both as consumers of material goods and as material objects themselves. Wives and daughters were expected to act as public displays for their husbands’ and fathers’ wealth, a role that upper- and middle-class women were always expected to fulfill; however, by the late-1800s and early-1900s, there were many more ways for women to display themselves to the benefit of their husbands and fathers. While turn-of-the-century women were still expected to fulfill many of the roles their mid- to late-nineteenth century counterparts did, their “center of power had” moved “away from the private space of the home to the public sphere” (40). This power shift resulted in

An interesting two-way flow between public and private spaces, a coextensive

process whereby the private became publicized and the public privatized. On the one hand, a code of etiquette that had evolved from private settings was extended to include public areas in order to control the interaction of people of a different class and gender, and on the other, the private space of the home and family life were no longer impervious to publicity. (63-4)

Women, thus, were no longer only responsible for controlling the private spaces of the home; they now had to manage the interplay between public and private spaces. Therefore, women began to function “as society’s gatekeepers,” in an attempt “to protect the privacy of the domestic” sphere while fulfilling their new public roles (40, 63). For Wharton, this interplay between public and private, which always existed to some degree as the two spheres overlapped more often than they remained separate, creates an interesting dilemma, as she considers if a woman like Lily can negotiate this interplay when she has only limited access to private spaces and is, therefore, forced to live out her life in interstitial spaces.

The interstitial nature of her life did not bother her as a debutante. In fact, Lily seems to have embraced it when she first came out, using it as a means to keep herself in the public eye. But at 29, Lily is beginning to feel as though she belongs nowhere and to resent that she must conform to society’s perceptions of her rather than developing her own way of being in the world. As William Modellmog suggests, Lily “accepts her existence in the public eye and has no desire to be sheltered from public view,” but she increasingly believes “the terms of her self-exposure must be her own” (345). If she is to construct herself according to her own terms, Lily needs a space in which she can escape “a selfhood defined by publicity” (345). She needs “a space whose privacy was impregnable, yet whose unity was grounded in the perfect harmony of subject and object” (343). Lily needs a home, a private space in which she can nurture her “complex inner life” (340) and claim her subjectivity on her own terms. However, the only private spaces that Lily has regular access to are one she does not possess outright—they are called hers, but they actually belong to others, as Lily does not own the homes in which the spaces are part of. Thus,

Lily feels as though she is under constant surveillance and, as such, is unable to separate her public and private selves or the public and private spaces she occupies throughout the novel. Lily's inability to separate the public Lily from what Gerty Farrish describes as "the real Lily" is further complicated by her transient lifestyle (*HM* 107).

As I have stated previously, Lily is constantly on the move. She travels from luxuriously appointed guestrooms, such as the one she often occupies at the Trenors' country house Bellomont, to her room at her aunt Peniston's Manhattan townhome, which is "as dreary as a prison" with its "monumental wardrobe and bedstead of black walnut" and "magenta 'flock' wall-paper" (*HM* 86). These rooms stand in stark contrast to the home she has imagined for herself: "an apartment which should surpass the complicated luxury of her friends' surroundings by the whole extent of that artistic sensibility which made her feel herself their superior; in which every tint and line should combine to enhance her beauty and give distinction to her leisure!" (86). For Lily, the way a home is decorated corresponds directly to the feelings the home and its interior design elicit in those who live there. Lily receives no comfort from any of her current residences, largely because she is not able to make these rooms her own. Thus, Lily is, in effect, homeless, and her "lack of a home is evidence of [her] marginal status" among her peers (Brooks 105).

Lily's virtual homelessness is similar to the state that Homi Bhabha describes as "unhomely" (10). For Bhabha, the "unhomely," a condition he specifically associates with women, dramatizes "the ambivalent structure of the civil State as it draws its rather paradoxical boundary between the public and the private spheres" (10). The "State," then, according to Bhabha, arbitrarily divides public and private, limiting women, for equally arbitrary reasons, to the private sphere. Bhabha elaborates upon the difference between public and private by relying upon a quotation from Hannah Arendt: "[the boundary between public and private] is the distinction between things that should be hidden and things that should be shown" (as cited by Bhabha 10). Women encounter "unhomely moments," as Bhabha terms them, when they are

unable to determine which “things” should be hidden and which revealed—or what aspects of their lives should remain private and which should be made public. The boundary between the two spheres and the subtle distinction between them can be seen as ambiguous and, even to some degree, arbitrary because we often fail to recognize that such distinctions and boundaries are purely theoretical. Indeed, the spheres themselves are largely theoretical. Bhabha asserts, however, that many individuals believe the separate spheres and the alleged distinctions between them are real. He further argues that ignoring the boundaries between the public and private realms “creates an uncertainty” in marginalized women (10). Although Bhabha’s assertions end here, he implies that marginalized women are most at risk of “uncertainty” because their tenuous positions in society make it impossible for them to live exclusively in the private realm. To survive, they must enter the public realm, either by taking jobs, as Frado and Linda Brent do, or putting themselves on display, as Lily does; they must transgress the very boundaries that they often claim to ignore. Thus, some women, both actual and fictional, feel displaced, and essentially, they become homeless as they are expected to locate themselves in a domestic sphere that is entirely “ascriptive”¹¹⁰ and that does not account either for them or for their marginalized status. The “ascriptive domestic sphere” often “results in redrawing the domestic sphere” as a “normalizing” and “individuating space” (11), failing to consider women who neither have access to the domestic sphere or do not find it normalizing or helpful to establishing their identities.

In the course of the novel, Lily moves farther from rather than toward any sense of homeliness; she moves from her aunt’s home, to guestrooms in the homes of friends, to a series of hotel rooms, and finally to a hall bedroom in a boarding house with a “blistered brown stone front,” windows adorned with “discoloured lace,” and a “muddy vestibule” with “Pompeian decoration” (*HM* 229). Although Lily lives in these rooms and even pays the rent for several of her hotel rooms and the room in the boarding house, none of these spaces is home to Lily because she is unable to decorate and adorn them in a way that is reflective of her style or her desires. Lily is unable to find comfort or solace in these rooms. The rooms in her aunt’s home and in her

friends' homes remind her that she must behave how these people expect her to. Similarly, the hotel rooms and the room in the boarding house remind her of her failures, of her inability to possess any sense of independence *and* still maintain membership in her social set. As Benet explains, Lily can neither "afford to have, or not to have, a house. Her circumstances deprive her not only of space but place, and have made her unable to create either for herself" ("Geography of Gender" 35). Because she refuses to sacrifice her desire for independence by marrying, Lily relegates herself to an interstitial existence. As I argue, Lily cannot reconcile her craving for independence with society's expectations—and, on some level, her own—that she marry well and run a home for her husband. Lily has the desire for a home of her own, but she has no real knowledge or experience of one, save those that belong to others. Without this knowledge, she cannot fully grasp the benefits of a home, at least as Wharton defines them. Lily remains "unhomely," as Bhabha terms it (10), because she is unable to come to terms with her place in either the public or private spheres or to determine where or what she truly wants to be. Lily, then, lives her entire adult life in a series of interstitial spaces.

Lily's presence in and Wharton's use of interstitial spaces is much different, however, from the other characters and writers I have discussed in earlier sections. Unlike Frado, Linda Brent, and Avis, Lily does not use interstitial spaces to her advantage. She does not use such spaces to locate moments of power to share her experiences as Brent does, nor does she use them to rebel or to develop her creativity as Frado and Avis, respectively, do. While Lily does use these spaces to see and be seen (fulfilling a key purpose as a debutante), more often than not, Lily simply exists in these spaces. Occasionally she uses these spaces to contemplate her life and to plan for her future, but generally, Lily follows her whims and does not utilize the interstitial spaces she occupies to her advantage at all. Lily fails to escape her interstitial existence because she is unable to exploit either the actual or metaphoric spaces she inhabits in order to benefit her or to transform her life. Lily's inability to use interstitial spaces to improve her life prevents her

from staking claim to any space or place she can call home, and without a home, Lily is doomed to perform for others rather than defining herself on her own terms.

For Wharton, as with Wilson and Jacobs, home is the space where one finds comfort, solace, independence, and some sense of freedom. Unlike Lily, Wharton was able to find and even to create a space of her own. Wharton built The Mount, her home in Lenox, Massachusetts, with her own money,¹¹¹ and she designed the home with “privacy, convenience,” and comfort in mind, things Wharton felt she lacked in the home she occupied as a child and a young married woman (Lee, *Edith Wharton* 145). These homes, all of which were either owned by her parents or were rented for Wharton and her husband Teddy following the advice of her parents,¹¹² were designed and organized more to social custom than to the needs and desires of those who lived in them. Wharton describes these homes, particularly those of her childhood, “as a collection of solid objects, strong colours, and thick textures. Huge pieces of furniture and acres of clutter and plush” were the hallmarks of these spaces (Lee, *Edith Wharton* 26-7). These homes were neither comforting nor functional as they were meant more for entertaining and displaying the Jones’s¹¹³ and the Whartons’ position in society than for enhancing the inner lives of their occupants. That Wharton built The Mount in Lenox, far from the society pressures of either New York or Newport, where most of her contemporaries built their second homes, emphasizes Wharton’s desire to create a space that was all her own.

As Hermione Lee describes it in her 2007 biography, Wharton designed The Mount for work, leisure, and selected visitors, not for show or large-scale entertaining. For all its lordly air, it is a functional house, planned for comfort and convenience. Outside—as with many of the big houses in the Berkshires—as well as the large kitchen garden and a big greenhouse, there was a working farm, on the model of an English landed estate. This had come with the land, but was actively kept up, . . . to provide themselves and their guests with fresh vegetables, milk, eggs, and meat. . . (145)

The Mount enabled Wharton to maintain connections to the upper-class society to which she had been born into *and* to live on her own terms. It is further significant, as Benert suggests, that The Mount is the “only house she built from the ground up” (“Geography” 38); indeed, Wharton often described it as “my first real home” (as cited by Benert, “Geography” 38). The intense feelings Wharton had for The Mount, as well as her home Pavillon Colombe in Saint-Brice,¹¹⁴ just northwest of Paris, “suggest that neither work nor friendships, the priorities of her adult life, could flourish without her own carefully constructed environment” (38). That Wharton denies Lily access to a similar space emphasizes her belief that people’s lives are “intrinsically connected to the setting in which they move” (Somers 133).

Lily is one of the few characters in all of her fiction that Wharton does not characterize, as Lee states, “through the decoration of houses” (*Edith Wharton* 18). While *The House of Mirth* is full of architectural details and references, Wharton never describes Lily in terms of a home, nor does she associate Lily with any one space or location. In fact, Wharton repeatedly emphasizes Lily’s dissatisfaction and discomfort in every space she occupies, save Selden’s apartment. Without a strong connection to any location, Lily becomes increasingly alienated from her society, and Wharton employs Lily to argue how important it is for a woman to possess “her own carefully constructed environment” (Benert, “Geography” 38). Without such a place, women can lose themselves too easily, as Lily does. In a home—or even a room—of her own, Lily could stop performing for her aunt, her friends, and potential suitors and determine who she is. With no experience or knowledge of home and limited access to the private sphere, Lily is trapped in interstitial spaces, unable to actively change any aspect of her life.

As an unmarried woman, Lily has virtually no access to the private sphere. Here I want to extend the definition of private sphere. I mean “the private sphere” not only to refer to all things domestic (Lily does have limited access to domestic life), but I mean it also to describe private life, the privileges of which Lily, and perhaps all unmarried women of her class, are denied. Because she is unmarried, Lily must live her life like an open book; she must adhere

strictly to the societal rules set out for women of her class. She cannot be seen un-chaperoned with married men, nor can she visit single men's homes alone. Lily must follow these rules regarding men or risk tarnishing her reputation, which must be intact if she is ever to marry well. Further, Lily cannot have a home of her own for similar reasons; as she tells Selden, "poor, miserable, marriageable girls" cannot live on their own (*HM* 8). Lily, and all unmarried women of her class, must appear to be virtuous, chaste, and chaperoned at all times or face the prospect of never marrying. If she were to rent a flat of her own, as Selden's cousin Gerty Farish¹¹⁵ does, Lily would only succeed in making herself unattractive to any man who may want to marry her. Without a home, Lily is denied access to the private sphere, and her inability to participate fully in domestic life forces her to be on constant display and, as critic Kristina Brooks suggests, renders Lily solely as an object to be admired and judged (100). Lily becomes increasingly "oppressed by the need to 'stage' [herself] for the public" (100). Her growing sense of oppression causes what Brooks describes as a "disjunction between [her] public [self] and private [self]," resulting in a psychic split within Lily (100). Lily's search for identity and subjectivity is explicitly linked to her search for privacy and for a home of her own. Benert asserts that Lily's society fails "to provide [her] with even the possibility of a home" (*AI* 123). Without a home, Lily is unable to thrive and grow, and she has neither the space, the place, nor a support system to help her do so. By the time the novel opens Lily has grown tired of her interstitial existence and of constantly performing for others. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff argues in her essay "Lily Bart and Masquerade Inscribed in the Female Mode," Lily needs to reinvent herself, but she is neither original nor brilliant enough "to invent an entirely *new* role for herself" (269-70).¹¹⁶

Unlike many of the other characters discussed in earlier sections, however, Lily is fully aware of her interstitial existence. She realizes she is something of an outsider, and she knows her financial situation is what makes her an outsider, as she admits to Gus Trenor, "I can't afford any of the things my friends do" (*HM* 66). Included in the upper middle-class social set because she was born into it and because she is beautiful and entertaining, Lily is also seen as a potential

liability by her wealthy friends because she is unmarried and constantly in need of money. In fact, Lily's friend Judy Trenor, who has made it her priority to see Lily married to a wealthy man, cannot understand why Lily continues to dismiss perfectly acceptable suitors like Percy Gryce. For Judy, marriage is the only answer to Lily's problems. If Lily were to marry someone like Gryce, she would have a life very much like Judy's—one full of house parties, bridge, and shopping trips. Lily would also have a greater measure of freedom if she were married because the societal rules that govern the behavior of unmarried women are stricter and more difficult to negotiate than those of married women such as Bertha Dorset and divorcées like Carry Fisher, both of whom openly disregard convention and do not suffer for it. While Carry can take money from her friends' husbands and Bertha can openly have affairs with younger men, Lily cannot even visit Selden's apartment alone without worrying that she will run into someone she knows. As a single woman, Lily will be made to pay for any perceived indiscretions whereas society will simply ignore those of married and divorced women. Lily, however, seemingly believes that she has a greater sense of freedom because she is unmarried. Maureen Montgomery defines her as "a modern woman," correctly observing that Lily "pushes the boundaries of acceptable behavior, such as smoking, gambling, flirting with married men," and traveling without a chaperone (98). While she does attempt to preserve her reputation, Lily feels increasingly strangled by society's strict rules and repeatedly breaks them, naively believing that doing so cannot do her any real harm. In the novel's opening chapter, for example, she visits Lawrence Selden's apartment alone, fully aware that she runs the risk of being seen by someone she knows and being marked as the type of woman who visits bachelors' apartments. She knows the rules of society, yet she frequently places herself beyond the "norms of her society" (98). As both "an unmarried woman and an orphan of limited means," with only a single family member to support her, Lily "cannot transgress boundaries" as easily as her married or even her divorced companions (98). In fact, Lily's position makes it more important that she adhere to society's rules regarding the behavior of marriageable women. She seems, however, unable to help herself and continually puts her

reputation at risk. Already seen as little more than an object by New York society, Lily persistently places herself in the position of being seen as promiscuous. She adds to her objectification and even her victimization because she cannot reconcile her desires for freedom with her desires for luxury and financial security.

Despite the strict set of rules she must follow, Lily is often able to manipulate her interstitial position to her financial advantage. She knows her beauty and her charm are assets not only to herself but also to her friends, especially at lengthy house parties, so she helps her friends by ensuring their parties are lively and their guests are entertained. In return, they are generous to her, often giving her dresses, jewelry, and, occasionally, money. While she is aware that her life cannot change a great deal unless she marries, Lily is beginning to experience “fits of angry rebellion against fate, when she longed to drop out of the race and make an independent life for herself” (*HM* 33). Lily is, however, largely unable to escape her upbringing and claim an independent life for herself.

Lily’s concept of independence, marriage, and home are primarily dependent upon the views of her mother and turn-of-the-century U.S. society, both of which often see marriage as essential for women and homes as “typifying [their] inhabitants’ social [lives]” (Benert *AI* 117).

Benert argues that

the nineteenth-century nuclear family entailed a shift away from the producing to the consuming household and from a gendered division of labor to a two-sphere society, in which the male governed the public and productive life and the female its consumption and domestic activities and relationships. (*AI* 113)

Benert goes on to state that this bifurcated society mainly affected the middle class, and as such “the middle-class household came to represent a moral ideal. The outward-turned ambition of the man was balanced by the inward-turning nurture of the woman” (113-14). In some ways, Benert’s assertions accurately represent the Bart household and Lily’s parents, specifically. Mr. Bart’s sole responsibility was to earn a living so that he could provide for his wife and daughter.

In fact, he is seemingly so consumed by work that Lily remembers rarely seeing “her father by daylight. All day he was ‘downtown’” (*HM* 26). For her part, Mrs. Bart seems to have accepted the middle-class ideal as Benert describes it. Her main focus as household manager was to present a well-ordered, fashionably decorated house to New York society. Further, Mrs. Bart believed it was her duty to introduce her daughter to the right people and to fashionable places, so they spent their summers in Newport or traveling in Europe and their winters in New York, attending society functions (*HM* 26). While Benert’s descriptions of “the nineteenth-century nuclear family” can be applied to the Barts, I argue that they, and especially Mrs. Bart (and, thus, by extension Lily) do not exist in a society with such neat divisions.

Mrs. Bart is, indeed, chiefly concerned with activities that are typically defined as domestic: she runs the home, she manages the servants, and she fulfills the family’s social responsibilities. Benert’s description of the middle-class household suggests, however, that women were, above all else, nurturing and predominantly concerned with “the spiritual education of their families” (*AI* 15). This description simply does not fit Mrs. Bart at all. She is far more concerned with appearances and public responsibilities, with the material rather than the spiritual—much more so than her husband. For her, providing her family with a sanctuary of domesticity was not a priority; indeed, creating a sanctuary of comfort from the outside world seems to have been the last thing on Mrs. Bart’s mind. She was far more concerned with attending the correct social functions, visiting fashionable locations, and preparing Lily for marriage to a wealthy man. In fact, Lily recalls growing up in

A house in which no one ever dined at home unless there was “company”;
a door-bell perpetually ringing; a hall-table showered with square envelopes
which were opened in haste, and oblong envelopes which were allowed to gather
dust in the depths of a bronze jar; a series of French and English maids giving
warning amid a chaos of hurriedly-ransacked wardrobes and dress-closets; an
equally changing dynasty of nurses and footmen; quarrels in the pantry, the

kitchen and the drawing room; precipitate trips to Europe, and returns with gorged trunks and days of interminable unpacking; semi-annual discussions as to where the summer should be spent, grey interludes of economy and brilliant reactions of expense. (*HM* 25)

The above passage reveals a great deal about Lily's childhood, her mother's personality, and Lily's resulting attitudes toward both men and money.

The Bart home was not a calm, comforting environment. It was a place where guests were privileged above family, invitations to society functions were coveted, and bills often went unpaid. With the constant flow of maids, nurses, and footmen in and out of the house, which suggests both that Mrs. Bart often quarreled with her servants and that the Barts may have struggled to pay them, young Lily seems to have experienced little stability. Further, the only reference to private spaces in this passage is in connection with quarrels. Based on the numerous details about money, it seems safe to surmise that at least some of the arguments were between Mr. and Mrs. Bart and likely were about their ever-changing financial situation. The "precipitate trips to Europe" suggest hard economic times for the family, as members of the upper-middle class often fled to Europe in attempts to live cheaply,¹¹⁷ and the "gorged trunks" call into question Mrs. Bart's ability to control her spending (*HM* 25). Society engagements and shopping, rather than family dinners, were clearly given precedence by Mrs. Bart. Indeed, Mrs. Bart went to great lengths to distance herself from her and her husband's families, whom she believed "lived like pigs" (26). Lily's childhood home, then, was one in which dining out, entertaining people, and moving up in society were more important than administering household accounts or spending time together. Lily grows up having little connection to her home or her extended family, despite their wealth, because Mrs. Bart deems them unworthy of her attentions. For Mrs. Bart, home is little more than a space in which to prepare for public appearances, display one's wealth, and to observe society. She has no deeper connection to home or even to family, and while this life appears to work for her, so long as Mr. Bart is able to keep the family financially solvent, it does

not always work for her daughter. Her preoccupation with society, money, and appearances affects Lily's understanding of home. While she imbibes some of her mother's beliefs—particularly those regarding money and appearances—Lily develops a different view of home: as an adult, she comes to see home as a place of solace and reprieve from society, yet she has no idea how to acquire a home for herself without marrying. Lily explicitly connects financial security and home—and believes she must sacrifice her independence and marry to have both.

In *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York*, Maureen Montgomery describes “the bourgeois home” as a “haven from the market place” and “something of a breathing space free from the forces of change bringing social disruption in their wake” (40). In other words, the home was the one location that was supposedly protected from the forces of money and the market place. Women were expected to keep these forces out of the home, focusing instead on religion, education, and other domestic virtues, even in the rapidly changing turn-of-the-century world. But, as Montgomery points out, a distinct separation between public and private became more and more difficult to maintain—if such a separation ever existed. While “it seemed as though women had made real gains in the control they were given over . . . household affairs, social life and child-rearing,” they were experiencing “the effects of urban expansion and technological innovation” (40). Increasingly, the public began to intrude upon the private, as money and consumer culture began affecting every aspect of American society. Montgomery's analysis certainly applies to the Bart household, where “there had never been enough money” (*HM* 26). Wharton describes Mrs. Bart as a “wonderful manager,” who “was famous for the unlimited effect she produced on limited means” (26). Wharton implies, however, that Mrs. Barton is not at all concerned with where the money she spends comes from so long as she has plenty of it. Mr. Bart, whom we assume works on Wall Street,¹¹⁸ was always held accountable for the family's financial straits. The Barts possess a gendered view of money—Mrs. Bart, as wife and mother, is to run the home and to spend the money that Mr. Bart earns. In turn, Mr. Bart, as husband and father, is expected to earn enough money to support his wife and

daughter in the upper middle-class lifestyle to which Mrs. Bart has grown accustomed. He is given virtually no say in how the home is run or how the money he earns is spent. Indeed, Mrs. Bart sees her husband as little more than a pocketbook, as she seems only to need him to pay the bills. She

denounce[s] him for having neglected to forward [her] remittances [to Europe];
but for the most part he was never mentioned or thought of till his patient
stooping figure presented itself on the New York dock as a buffer between the
magnitude of his wife's luggage and the restrictions of the American custom-
house. (26)

Lily learns from her mother that husbands and fathers are only worthy of attention when their wives and children are in need of money. A husband's sole purpose, according to Mrs. Bart, is to make enough money to ensure his wife and children can live fashionable lives.

While Mr. Bart is responsible for financially supporting the family, Mrs. Bart is responsible for training Lily how to behave in upper-class society. Therefore, Mrs. Bart views herself as a society matron whose responsibility it is to induct "younger members of the social elite into the system" (Montgomery 41). While Mrs. Bart successfully teaches Lily how to run a home, to receive a call, and to appear in public, among other things, she fails to teach Lily the value of money, save that she must marry a wealthy man. As a young woman Lily has no idea that her own family's money is almost exclusively dependent upon the success of the stock market or even what it means to work "*down town*"¹¹⁹ (*HM* 26). Thus, Lily grows up only knowing that she must have money, not understanding how difficult it can be to earn it. Mrs. Bart often fails to recognize—or perhaps even refuses to recognize—the fluctuations of her husband's wealth, so she assumes that the family will always have enough money to maintain their current lifestyle. Despite her own experiences with an ever fluctuating income, Mrs. Bart only prepares Lily for one type of future: one in which Lily will marry and become a society matron herself. Her unwillingness to consider a different future for her daughter seems

particularly naïve given the numerous references to the constant changes in Mr. Bart's income. The "precipitate trips to Europe" and the "grey interludes of economy" suggest that the Barts have experienced financial hardships in the past (*HM* 25). Mrs. Bart cannot prepare Lily for any other sort of life because she cannot contemplate any other existence, either for her daughter or herself.

For Mrs. Bart—and perhaps for all the women in her social set—money and the marketplace are very much a part of the domestic sphere; in fact, I would argue that money and the ability to possess it and spend it as she chooses are the focus of Mrs. Bart's life. She is unable to separate her home from the marketplace, and thus, her home was not a place where one could take refuge from the rapid changes taking place in society. Often the bourgeois home was seen as a place where such changes could be monitored, considered, and responded to. Women may have made some gains in the level of control they maintained over household affairs, but they could not protect their families from "the emerging culture of consumer capitalism" (Montgomery 40). In fact, as I stated earlier, women were expected to participate actively in the growing consumer culture as part of their roles as domestic managers. The center of power shifted, according to Montgomery, from "the private space of the home to the public sphere" (40). The term shift, however, suggests that a distinct separation between public and private existed at one point, which is largely inaccurate.

As Amy Kaplan contends in her essay "Manifest Domesticity," most recent studies of the separate spheres "paradigm have revealed the permeability of the border that separates the spheres, demonstrating that the private feminized space of the home both infused and bolstered the public male arena of the market" (183). Following Kaplan's assessment, I see the consumer culture that was rapidly developing at the turn of the twentieth century resulting in an overlap of spheres rather than the shift that Montgomery describes. This overlap conflates the public and the private and makes it progressively difficult to determine where the public ends and the private begins. For her part, Mrs. Bart seemingly embraces the conflation of public and private as she

forsakes her more traditionally feminine and private responsibilities in favor of the ones she must perform in the public realm. Further, Mrs. Bart clearly possesses the desire for consumer goods that Montgomery describes, but she does not believe part of her responsibility to her family is to keep the public realm from intruding upon the private one. In fact, Mrs. Bart seems to believe her primary duty to her daughter is to teach her to be mindful of her place in society at all times. She actually seems to think that training her daughter to appreciate and desire material goods is part of her responsibility to ensure Lily is inducted into the right society. Mrs. Bart wholeheartedly accepts the “responsibility to promote the transmission of class onto her [daughter] by ensuring . . . [she was] well versed in social conventions. In this, more attention was paid to training daughters in the codes of gentility” primarily because women were seen “as social arbiters” and “their knowledge of etiquette” was considered a marketable skill, especially in the marriage market (Montgomery 41). Indeed, Mrs. Bart and the women of her social set remained focused on “instructing girls exclusively in the ornamental graces requisite for obtaining an advantageous familial alliance” through marriage (Romero 75), rather than helping them negotiate the rapidly changing economy and their roles in it. As Lora Romero asserts, this sort of education “privileged the development of certain pleasing and marketable skills in women,” focusing on “accomplishments such as dancing and piano playing” (75). Mrs. Bart clearly emphasized such training for Lily, who is accomplished in all of the feminine arts. Mrs. Bart believes that Lily’s education, if successful, will culminate in her marriage to a wealthy man, which will ensure that Lily will never have to worry about money as her own mother has had to do.

In some sense, Mrs. Bart sees Lily as little more than an investment that she must guard carefully in order to guarantee that she will receive the biggest return on her efforts. Mary McAleer Balkun goes so far as to suggest that Mrs. Bart views Lily “as a commodity in the marriage market” and treats her as little more than a piece of “merchandise” (74). A lucrative marriage for Lily not only achieves Lily’s financial security, but it will also strengthen the entire family’s place in upper middle-class New York society. While Mrs. Bart does share society’s

opinions of marriage with Lily, she does not teach her daughter anything about the emotional aspects of marriage. Lily comes of age believing marriage is little more than a business partnership in which the husband provides the wealth and the wife displays the wealth, both on her body and in their home.¹²⁰ From her mother, Lily learns that men are meant to provide their wives with money and little else. In return “women legitimize their men’s resources” by wearing the right clothes to the right places and by inviting fashionable people to their lavishly decorated homes (Benert “Geography” 27). Marriage is very much a function of the marketplace, at least for this social class, not removed from it as some critics have suggested. In Mrs. Bart’s mind, and perhaps in the minds of many of her peers, husbands represent financial security. She sees marriage as a means to elevate and protect a woman’s position in society. Love, emotion, and romance are unimportant. Because her own marriage has not always afforded her the financial and societal security she desires, Mrs. Bart is even more determined that Lily will marry well.

Before Lily is able to put her education to use and find an appropriate husband, Mr. Bart unexpectedly arrives home one Saturday at luncheon and announces, “I’m ruined” (28). Mrs. Bart immediately acts to preserve some sense of the family’s dignity: she sends Lily upstairs, telling her “don’t talk to the servants” (28). In a defining moment, Mrs. Bart finally seems to recognize the importance of privacy. By instructing Lily not to share the news with the servants, Mrs. Bart tacitly tells Lily that her father’s financial problems are a family matter and are not to be discussed publicly. Ironically, only with their financial ruin imminent does Mrs. Bart finally seem to want to keep her family and her home separate from the marketplace. Further, Mrs. Bart sends Lily away in what can be read as an attempt to prevent Lily from learning the extent of the family’s financial troubles. After all, Lily is only nineteen and has just made her debut in society. By keeping her somewhat ignorant of the family’s financial circumstances, Mrs. Bart may be hopeful that Lily can marry before the rest of New York learns of the family’s revised status. Further, Mrs. Bart may also be hopeful that Mr. Bart is exaggerating, that the problems can be resolved, and that their finances restored before any one outside the family learns of their losses.

For her part, Lily does not—indeed, perhaps she cannot—fully comprehend what Mr. Bart’s announcement means for the family, as she knows almost nothing about money and even less about the stock market. With her father’s announcement, though, Lily quickly begins to learn money’s pivotal role in maintaining the lifestyle and the house that she and her mother are accustomed to. The news of Mr. Bart’s economic losses renders Lily as even more of a commodity in her mother’s eyes. Mrs. Bart ceases to see her role in Lily’s marriage as that of mentor and guide, and she begins to actively seek out potential husbands for her daughter. With the sudden change in her father’s fortune, Lily must marry well, not only to elevate the family’s social status, but to ensure they do not become paupers.

After her father’s lunchtime declaration, Lily’s entire life changes, including her attitude toward marriage. Mrs. Bart view of marriage had already greatly influenced Lily’s opinion of marriage and men, but as a young debutante, Lily assumed marriage was inevitable, and she gave it little thought, likely believing she would marry when the right—and very wealthy—man came along. Witnessing her mother’s dismissive and belittling treatment of her father has also led Lily to believe that most men are “silent and effaced” (*HM* 26). Indeed, Lily remembers little about her father other than he was “bald and slightly stooping, with streaks of grey in his hair, and a tired walk” (26). Mr. Bart played a minor role in his daughter’s life, and thus, she seems to accept her mother’s opinion that Mr. Bart—and, thus, all husbands in general—is meant to fill the “intermediate space between the butler and the man who came to wind the clocks” (25). In fact, Mr. Bart seems to have played little role in Lily’s life at all, and by the time she is an adult, he is little more than a “dim and pathetic fixture of Lily’s scant childhood memories” (Showalter 96). Again, having given marriage little consideration and having few other marriages to base her opinion on, Lily seems to believe that her own husband will be much like her father and that her own marriage, therefore, will be very similar to her parents’. She will marry because that is what women of her social set do. At 19, Lily seems to have believed—much like her mother—that one

man was not drastically different from another. Indeed, the only thing that makes men different is how well they are able to provide for their wives and children.

With her family's unexpected change in income, however, Lily grows increasingly aware of her position: by marrying quickly and well, she can literally save the family. For the first time in her life Lily begins to rebel and rebuffs any man who proposes, most of whom seem to be a great deal like her father. As she later tells Selden, "I threw away one or two good chances when I first came out," and she has recently ruined her chances with a wealthy man named Dillworth¹²¹ and Percy Gryce, whose father became wealthy by inventing a "device for excluding fresh air from hotels" (10, 20). Lily implies that both of these men were controlled by their mothers and that both were very boring. Having witnessed the unhappiness of her parents' marriage, she puts off her own marriage, while simultaneously aware that she must marry if she is to maintain her position in society. Lily's eventual rejection of marriage as the only solution to her virtual homelessness can be read as her refusal to commodify herself for her family's benefit or her own.

Mr. Bart dies¹²² soon after ruining his wife and daughter's leisurely lunch, presumably from an illness brought on by extreme stress. As a result, Lily, who has never given money much thought, is forced to learn the value money and her worth on the marriage market, causing her to revise both her definition of home and marriage. Mrs. Bart and Lily, who are essentially penniless, must leave their home and move "from place to place, now paying long visits to relations whose house-keeping Mrs. Bart criticized, and who deplored the fact that she let Lily breakfast in bed when she had no prospects before her" (*HM* 29). After exhausting their welcome with family, Lily and Mrs. Bart move to "cheap continental refuges," where Mrs. Bart presumably hopes no one has heard of their financial misfortune and Lily can find a wealthy European husband (29). Neither woman is prepared to deal with the revised circumstances of their life, but Lily, to her credit, is able to adapt quickly, whereas her mother becomes increasingly bitter and cynical. Mrs. Bart spends her time cursing her husband and trying to find Lily a suitable husband. She takes comfort in only one thing: Lily's beauty, which she sees as

their salvation. If wielded correctly, Lily's looks, which Balkun characterizes as "rare" (75), can attract a rich husband and restore the Bart name to its former prominence. Mrs. Bart, thus, studied Lily's beauty

with a kind of passion, as though it were some kind of weapon she had slowly fashioned for her vengeance. It was the last asset in their fortunes, the nucleus around which their life was to be rebuilt. She watched it jealously, as though it were her own property and Lily its mere custodian; and she tried to instill in the latter a sense of the responsibility that such a charge involved. (*HM* 29)

Mrs. Bart cannot separate herself or her daughter from the marketplace—she has invested so much of her life in being an affluent, well-respected society woman that she becomes obsessed with reclaiming her former life. She begins to lose touch with reality as the idea of Lily marrying well consumes her. Mrs. Bart constantly reminds Lily that she is the only one who can save them, repeatedly telling Lily "But you'll get it all back—you'll get it all back, with your face. . . ." (25). Lily slowly begins to understand that her mother sees her as little more than a commodity to be traded for a better life. As her mother resents their current lifestyle, Lily begins to resent that she is being encouraged to prostitute herself to improve her mother's station in life, and she begins "to define herself as a commodity" (Goodman 50).

Mrs. Bart unknowingly instills the seeds of dissent in Lily, who chafes at her mother's constant refrain to marry for financial security: "she was secretly ashamed of her mother's crude passion for money" (*HM* 30). Wai Chee Dimock clearly views Lily's reaction to marriage and her mother's love of money as somewhat radical. She argues that "Lily is clearly caught up in the ethos of exchange. And yet, her repeated and sometimes intentional failure to find a buyer, her ultimate refusal to realize her 'asset'—as her mother designates her beauty—makes her something of a rebel" (64). Frequently told what she can achieve by manipulating men with her beauty, Lily defies her mother's (and, to some degree, society's) expectations. She preferred "to

think of her beauty as a power for good, as giving her the opportunity to attain a position where she should make her influence felt in the vague diffusion of refinement and good taste" (*HM* 30). As befitting a young woman of her age, her time, her place, and her class, Lily desires emotion, romance, and sentiment, along with a luxurious home and financial security. She dreams of marrying "an English nobleman" or "an Italian prince" (30). Rather than encouraging Lily to marry immediately for the family's benefit, Mrs. Bart's insistence on marrying for money makes the idea of such a marriage distasteful to Lily. Thus, she delays marriage under the pretenses of finding the right man, one who can provide for her both financially and emotionally. Further, what begins as an innocent act of rebellion against her mother develops into a something more: Lily develops a sense of independence, which makes her mother's view of marriage even more unpleasant to her. As Susan Goodman argues, "Lily knows that the ladylike barter she must effect would necessitate her giving up the little sense of self she possesses, and that is a form of living suicide to which she cannot contract" (50). The longer she remains unmarried, the more independent she grows, and eventually, she values her independence so much that she unconsciously rejects much of what her mother has taught her in order to remain independent.

Given her financial situation and her background, however, Lily can never be completely independent and live the lifestyle she was taught to appreciate. As I have stated, Lily's education was based on the assumption that she would follow in her mother's footsteps—she is meant to marry, have children, and become a society woman. Neither she nor her mother ever entertains any other possibilities for her future, even after her father's monetary losses oblige the family to change their lifestyle. As a result, Lily is never given an opportunity to develop intellectually or spiritually; her education focuses on preparing her to be a New York society woman. She is never encouraged to create what Catharine Beecher and other education reformers called "an integrated female self" (Romero 76). Beecher and her colleagues advocated that young women be educated for life beyond "the marriage market" (76). Arguing that "women were to spend the greater part of their lives in the home," Beecher believed "their education should prepare them for

that life, not for a lifetime in the ballroom, the theater, or the drawing room” (76). While Wharton does not believe women should live out their lives in the domestic realm as Beecher and her followers did, Wharton does use Lily to question the lives that women of her class are taught to value and expected to lead. Through Lily (and to some extent Gerty Farish), Wharton argues that women may want more out of life than shopping, parties, and attending society functions. Lily, however, is unable to achieve any other sort of life because she has only been prepared for a life as the wife of a rich man. Once she experiences a taste of an independent life, one in which she is able to make her own choices, she begins to long for a different existence, as evidenced by her refusal to marry. Indeed, Lily names her desire in the first chapter of the novel when she and Selden discuss Gerty Farish: “she likes being good, and I like being happy. And besides, she is free and I am not” (*HM* 8). Lily wants to be independent like Gerty, but she cannot completely exorcise the values her mother and society have instilled in her. As much as she wants her personal freedom, Lily also desires luxury, and she realizes that she cannot have both. Money and marriage continue to be the focus of her life largely because Lily can do little more than *imagine* an alternative life. As Wolff argues, “the core of [Lily’s] dilemma might be best characterized as the plight of a heroine poignantly in search of an appropriate scenario” (“Masquerade” 269). She is unable to find the right “scenario” for herself because Lily cannot ignore the material circumstances of her life; neither can she deny that she wants “to reject the role” her mother and her society have dictated she follow (269). Lily is, then, not “original enough—or brilliant enough, for it would require *great brilliance*—to invent an entirely *new* role for herself”¹²³ (269-70). Lily, then, has little choice but to tailor herself to her society, her environment, and others’ perceptions of her. She remains on the fringes of New York society, living the only life she has ever known and been prepared for. But her inability to change coupled with her yearning for a different life places Lily in an interstitial space: she is neither the wife of a wealthy man nor an independent woman. As the novel progresses, Lily becomes increasingly discontented with her interstitial existence. She is tired of being neither one thing

nor another, yet she is seemingly unable to take any definitive action that would allow her to revise her life according to her own terms.

Mrs. Bart dies two years after her husband—"of deep disgust" (*HM* 30). Orphaned, homeless, and virtually penniless, Lily begins to realize that her position in society is somewhat tenuous. In spite of her growing desire for independence, Lily does realize that she needs somewhere to live and someone to help her mediate the rules and expectations of society. Her extended family is all she has to turn to. Following her mother's death, Lily becomes the focus of "a family council composed of wealthy relatives" whom Mrs. Bart openly scorned (31). None of Lily's relatives is particularly interested in giving her a home, perhaps understandably, given the way they were treated by Mrs. Bart: "It may be that they had an inkling of the sentiments in which [Lily] had been brought up, for none of them manifested a very lively desire for her company" (31). Eventually Mr. Bart's widowed sister, Mrs. Peniston, unexpectedly announces, "I'll take her for a year" (31). Mrs. Peniston makes certain everyone is aware that she is only offering Lily a home because no one else does. Like her sister-in-law, Mrs. Peniston is very aware of public perception, and she does not want to be seen as shirking her familial obligations: "It would have been impossible for Mrs. Peniston to be heroic on a desert island, but with the eyes of her little world upon her she took a certain pleasure in her act" (31). For her part, Lily is grateful to have a place to live. Lily is aware that in order to maintain her lifestyle and to find a husband, she needs an appropriate guardian, someone who can provide her with a sense of respectability and the support of a family name. Mrs. Peniston, contrary to Mrs. Bart's estimation, is a respected member of New York society, and as her charge, Lily affirms her place in the New York social scene. Under Mrs. Peniston's roof, Lily experiences a sense of security, something that has been missing from her life since her father's death. While living with her aunt does make Lily feel more secure and puts a stop to the constant moving she endured with her mother, it does not end her sense of homelessness or her interstitiality.

Despite Lily and the novel's preoccupation with home, Wharton reveals nothing about Lily's feelings toward her own childhood home. The only description we are given of the home that Lily grew up in focuses on Mrs. Bart's preoccupation with entertaining. Lily seems only to remember her childhood home as a "house in which no one ever dined at home unless there was 'company'" (HM 25). At no point in the novel does Lily reminisce about her parents' home. In fact, Lily is wholly oblivious to the concept of home until her mother's death and she begins living with her aunt. Lily's reaction to her aunt's decorating style prompts her to consider how a person uses a home to reflect her personal style and attitude toward life. Mrs. Peniston's home clearly mirrors her view of the world and her opinion of life. The interior of her home is quite literally oppressive and airless. Mrs. Peniston "belonged to the class of old New Yorkers who have always lived well, dressed expensively, and done little else; and to those obligations, [she] faithfully conformed" (31). Having always been "a looker-on at life," Mrs. Peniston decorates her home according to fashion and propriety, rather than her own taste or a sense of comfort (31). She favors black walnut, steel engravings, and copies of Roman sculptures, and her sitting room has a "black satin armchair tufted with yellow buttons, beside a bead-work table bearing a bronze box with a miniature of Beatrice Cenci on the lid" (135). Her house is outdated, as Mrs. Peniston has not redecorated since her husband's death many years earlier, and it is uncomfortable and unwelcoming. Lily, who is beginning to value freedom and to wonder if she must marry at all, finds her aunt's home stifling and, literally, dark. Mrs. Peniston, who is determined to keep her furniture and artwork from prematurely fading, "rages when she discovers even a ray of light peeping through" the heavy drapes that cover every window in the house (Clubbe 544). Indeed, Mrs. Peniston is repeatedly seen scrutinizing the rooms of her home to make sure the curtains have been drawn properly. As she tells Lily once upon finding the curtains up, "I saw a streak of light under one of the blinds as I drove up: it's extraordinary that I can never teach that woman to draw them down evenly" (HM 84). Following her husband's death, Mrs. Peniston seems to have willingly entombed herself in her oppressive home and her monotonous wardrobe:

Mrs. Penison was a small plump woman, with a colourless skin, lined with trivial wrinkles. Her grey hair was arranged with precision and her clothes looked excessively new and yet slightly old-fashioned. They were always black and tightly fitting, with an expensive glitter: she was the kind of woman who wore jet at breakfast. Lily had never seen her when she was not cuirassed in shining black, with small tight boots, and an air of being packed and ready to start; yet she never started. (84)

For Mrs. Peniston, a home—much like a wardrobe—is something one must have, not something one must love. Her home, then, is appropriately and expensively adorned, following the precepts of current fashion—or at least what was fashionable when Mr. Peniston died. It is unimportant to Mrs. Peniston if her home is comfortable or beautiful; in fact, she seems to be completely unaware of either comfort or beauty. She only cares that her home displays her wealth and her position as a respected member of society.

Mrs. Peniston also values her home as a place where she can observe society without being a part of it. Her house is something of a fortress: it shields her from society, while allowing her to venture out into it occasionally. Mrs. Peniston was widowed at a relatively young age; in fact, Wharton describes Mr. Peniston's passing as "a remote event" (*HM* 32). Mrs. Peniston has largely withdrawn from society because she feels a widow should do so out of deference to her husband. She only attends family functions, and she rarely entertains. Her home, her wardrobe, and her activities echo her belief that her life is essentially over. That Mrs. Penison still follows all the conventions of widowhood emphasizes her inability to adapt to her changed status. As the above description indicates, Mrs. Peniston lives something of an interstitial life, residing in a border space that allows her to withdraw from society and simultaneously enables her to stay abreast of the goings-on of every member of the New York social elite. Like Lily, Mrs. Peniston is neither one thing nor the other: she is neither a recluse nor a society matron, neither too old to withdraw from life nor a debutante. Her dress clearly reflects the interstitiality of her life. She

presumably purchases new clothes every season, yet she never follows fashion, choosing instead to wear styles that are now seen as out-of-date and “old-fashioned” (HM 84). Her penchant for jet suggests that she either waiting for callers or about to go calling herself, yet she seems to leave the house rarely. Further, she is always dressed as though she is “ready to start,” yet she never does. In fact, Mrs. Peniston does little more than “habitually” occupy her sitting room, with its “too-solid Victorian décor and glacial neatness” (Clubbe 544). Adding to her interstitial existence is her inability to reconcile what she perceives as her duty as a widow with her desire to participate in society.

From her prison-like home, Mrs. Peniston observes and comments on society, but she cannot bring herself to attend society events, despite her longing to do so. She does not, however, cut herself off from society altogether. Thus, she grants very few individuals access to her home; only her young cousin Grace Stepney and Lily are routinely welcomed into Mrs. Peniston’s confidences. Both women are expected to keep her fully apprised of every society affair they attend—as well as the ones they do not. She demands more intimate descriptions of Lily, who is invited out more often than Grace. She is, in fact, disappointed when Lily is unable to recount the minutest details of any event she attends, telling her, “Really, Lily, I don’t see why you took the trouble to go to the [party], if you don’t remember what happened or whom you saw there” (HM 85). Mrs. Peniston seems to want to live vicariously through Lily. Having Lily in her home and hearing about the parties, the weddings, and the other gatherings she attends makes Mrs. Peniston feel as though she is still a part of society. She needs Lily to keep her informed of the latest gossip, fashions, and society happenings. Lily, therefore, sees Mrs. Peniston as one those

old New Yorkers who have always lived well, dressed expensively, and done little else; and to these inherited obligations Mrs. Peniston faithfully conformed. She had always been a looker-on at life, and her mind resembled one of those little mirrors which her Dutch ancestors were accustomed to affix to their upper

windows, so that from the depths of an impenetrable domesticity they might see what was happening in the street. (32)

Through Lily, she is able to remain connected to society, making her existence less interstitial. From Mrs. Peniston, Lily learns what she does not want her home or her life to be like. As Renée Somers asserts, “Lily’s revulsion to Mrs. Peniston’s home is more involved than a basic aesthetic response to its depressing interiors. Fleeing to country homes and other places is a means by which Lily escapes Mrs. Peniston’s *manner of living*: she is stagnant, numb, and fixed in her ways” (133).¹²⁴ Lily clearly does not want to end up like her aunt, yet she does seem to hope for more guidance from Mrs. Peniston than she receives.

In her aunt’s home, Lily is well provided for. She has a permanent residence, can come and go as she pleases, and, other than keeping her aunt apprised of society activities, does not have to account for her actions. Unlike Mrs. Bart, who considered Lily’s life her own, Mrs. Peniston is not involved in Lily’s life at all. She

had not felt called upon to do anything for her charge: she had simply stood aside and let her take the field. Lily had take it, at first with the confidence of assured possessorship, then with gradually narrowing demands, till she now found herself actually struggling for a foothold on the broad space which had once seemed her own for the asking. How it happened she did not yet know. Sometimes she thought it was because Mrs. Peniston had been too passive, and again, she feared it was because she herself had not been passive enough . . . whether she charged herself with these faults or absolved herself from them, made no difference in the sum-total of her failure.

(HM 33)

Mrs. Bart’s incessant nagging to marry for money has been replaced by Mrs. Peniston’s complete passivity regarding Lily’s future. At first, Lily, who had begun to openly resent her mother’s constant interference, welcomes the freedom living with her aunt offers her. But, as she grows

older and remains unmarried, Lily begins to question her ability to find herself a husband and seems to wonder if her life would be different if her aunt offered her more guidance. Lily seemingly recognizes that her aunt's disinterest in her places her in a precarious position on the marriage market. Lily has no relative to advise her, to introduce her to appropriate suitors, to remind her to behave properly, or to advocate for her. While her friends, especially Judy Trenor and Carry Fisher, attempt to do these things for her, they also encourage Lily to engage in behavior, such as drinking, smoking, and gambling that render her less marketable to certain men.¹²⁵ Living in her aunt's home, then, does not alleviate any aspect of Lily's interstitial existence. In fact, having a guardian who plays almost no part in her life actually heightens her interstitiality. After her mother's death and in light of her aunt's unwillingness to help her, Lily is forced to act on her own behalf, and she makes a series of poor decisions, each of which ultimately keeps her in interstitial spaces. Lily does, however, have the means to free herself from the interstitiality that has become her life—at least to a degree—if she were to marry. But Lily repeatedly refuses to take advantage of any of the marriage offers that come her way. With each proposal that she refuses, Lily makes her position in society more unstable.

Lily begins living with her aunt when she is only 21. Young and relatively inexperienced, Lily is typically read by critics as wanting to marry. The fact that she is still unmarried eight years later is frequently mentioned in the novel. Lily herself realizes that she is something of an anomaly in her social set; that Lily has not yet been branded a spinster is somewhat unusual in itself. Lily's age makes her position in her social set more insecure. Maureen Montgomery describes the time women spent as debutantes as

fraught with trying to remain within acceptable boundaries of behavior in public, boundaries that they were encouraged to explore during the controlled opportunities for heterosociability, when there was considerable pressure to secure the communally desired outcome of marriage. This was the period in women's lives when their opportunities for display were optimal. (127)

For debutantes, being seen in an appropriate context, such as at a society ball, a theater performance, or opening-night at the opera gave them the opportunity to be seen by all of New York society in general and wealthy, eligible bachelors in particular. Most debutantes were on display in this way for a relatively short time. Mae Welland of Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, for example, is out for only two years before becoming engaged to Newland Archer, and she spent the last several months before her engagement being courted by Archer. The period between coming out and getting married was meant, as Montgomery asserts, to offer young women some sense of life beyond the home, while simultaneously preparing them for a life inside the home. This is not to suggest, however, that debutantes had a greater sense of freedom than married women. On the contrary, women on the marriage market were expected to be on their best social behavior. In general, young debutantes could not be seen smoking, drinking, gambling, or traveling alone. Most of Lily's contemporaries would have taken great care not to be seen behaving in any way that could be called inappropriate. Further, most young women of Lily's social set would have been guided through this period in their lives by their mothers or some other female family member. These individuals likely would have chaperoned every activity in these young women's lives to ensure they did not damage their own or their families' reputations. Once they married, women were allowed a greater measure of freedom, as they were no longer expected to be in the public view at all times. By not marrying, Lily has knowingly and, I argue, willingly extended her period in the public eye because she mistakenly believes she has guaranteed herself more freedom than she would have been allowed if she had married. In fact, Lily seems to truly enjoy her period in "the public eye and has no desire to be sheltered and concealed from view" (Moddelmog 345). Claiming to be a modern woman, Lily "pushes the boundaries of acceptable behavior" (Montgomery 98). Her unconventional behavior demonstrates that Lily ignores that there are two sets of values for women in her social set: one for married women and one for unmarried women. Lily repeatedly behaves as a married woman by smoking, drinking, gambling, and flirting with married men, and she places herself "outside

the dominate norms of her society. As an unmarried woman, [Lily] cannot transgress the boundaries as easily as her married companions” (98). For her part, Lily freely admits that she has pushed her debutante status much farther than most women would have been allowed, telling Selden, “I’ve been about too long—people are getting tired of me; they are beginning to say I ought to marry” (*HM* 10).

Ironically, Lily does recognize the value of marriage, especially for women of her economic position, and it is for that reason that, at 29, she is still searching, although somewhat half-heartedly, for a husband. Many critics, including Cynthia Griffin Wolff and Kristina Brooks, argue that Lily remains unmarried because she wants to marry for love not money; such readings privilege Lily’s romantic tendencies over her imperfect sense of practicality. Indeed, Brooks contends that Lily longs for “a stable, ordered” existence, which Brooks implies that Lily can only achieve through a marriage built on love (95). I want to argue, however, that Lily has no aspirations for marriage. In fact, Lily unconsciously—and at least on one occasion consciously—sabotages every relationship she has had that could have ended in an advantageous marriage. Lily even acknowledges that she “threw away one or two good chances when [she] first came out” (10), and in the course of the novel she ruins her chances with two very wealthy, respectable men: Dilworth and Percy Gryce, whom Lily believes might “decide to do her the honour of boring her for life” (*HM* 23). Further, Simon Rosedale proposes marriage to her on two separate occasions, and Lily refuses him both times. Additionally, Lily does not pursue marriage with Selden, the one man to whom she is intellectually and emotionally attracted. In fact, Lily tells Selden in the first chapter of the novel that she does not want to marry him and that it would “be stupid of you to make love to me” (9). Lily wants independence, not marriage, and while she is aware that marriage to a wealthy man will ensure her economic freedom, she is equally aware that no marriage will guarantee her any amount of personal freedom. As the wife of a wealthy man and eventually the mother of his children, Lily would be little more than her husband’s possession. And although being possessed by a wealthy, respectable man would ensure Lily a

life of luxury and relative ease, she wants both freedom and luxury. Thus, the two things that Lily desires the most are in direct opposition to one another, as she cannot maintain her life of luxury without marrying and marriage would not ensure her the freedom for which she longs. Unable to reconcile these desires, Lily remains in interstitial spaces, as doing so enables her to enjoy a modicum of freedom while living a life of material ease and comfort, yet she is unable to use these spaces to empower herself in any significant way.

Wharton calls attention to Lily's desire for independence early in the novel when she describes Lily's initial reaction to life with Mrs. Peniston: "[Lily] saw that at all costs she must keep Mrs. Peniston's favour till . . . she could *stand on her own legs*" (32).¹²⁶ Wharton's choice of words in this passage is significant. Lily does not believe that she must stay in her aunt's good graces until she marries. Rather, Wharton has Lily want to maintain her aunt's good humor into; she can she "stand on her own legs," until she can provide for herself. Here, Wharton suggests that Lily will not and—more importantly—does not want to escape her interstitial existence by marrying. Having just endured an emotional two years in which her family lost their fortune, both her parents died, and she was frequently uprooted, Lily has learned that she can only truly depend on herself. Thus, she craves independence above everything else in life, including marriage. Lily's longing for independence manifests itself in her desire for a space of her own, which she repeatedly expresses throughout the novel. Lily seems to believe that possessing a space of her own will enable her to live her life according to her own ideals, participating in society and being on her own when she chooses. She, thus, does not seek a home to end her interstitial life, but rather she longs for one so she can continue her interstitial life on her own terms.

Lily's desire for a space of her own, however, is complicated by her somewhat limited experience with and understanding of home. Having moved from her parents' house to the residences of various family members to several European hotels and finally to her aunt's townhouse, Lily seems very familiar with the idea of home. She has, after all, been a guest in

some of the finest homes in New York City and the surrounding suburbs. But her experience has always been that of daughter, poor relation, or visitor. Lily has never possessed a home of her own, and she has not been permitted to leave her mark on any of the homes she has stayed in. Even in her parents' home, it is unlikely that Lily was allowed to contribute much to its design or decoration. We know nothing of this space, however, as Wharton does not include a description of Lily's childhood bedroom in the novel. That Lily never reminisces about the security and comfort of her childhood room—even in her darkest moments—seems telling. Lily has no connection to a specific space. Lily has no opinion about a home or space of her own until she moves in with her aunt. Surrounded by the “ghastly décor” of Mrs. Peniston's “opulent townhome,” Lily feels stifled” (Clubbe 544). For the first time in her life, she experiences a physical reaction to her environment: “The house, with its state of unnatural immaculateness and order, was as dreary as a tomb, and. . . [Lily] felt as though she were buried alive in the stifling limits of Mrs. Peniston's existence” (*HM* 79). As critic John Clubbe asserts, no interior “could be more antithetical to Lily's mobility, her fluid sensibilities, and her vague vision of an ideal interior” than her aunt's home (544).

Indeed, Lily finds the home “as dreary as a tomb,” and she physically “revolted from the complacent ugliness of Mrs. Peniston's black walnut, from the slippery gloss of the vestibule tiles, and the mingled odour of sapolio and furniture-polish that met her at the door” (*HM* 78). Her own room provides Lily with no more comfort than the rest of the house. While the “room was large and comfortably-furnished,” it reflects nothing of Lily or her personal style (86). If the rest of the house reminds Lily of a tomb, her own room is “as dreary as a prison,” with its

monumental wardrobe and bedstead of black walnut [which] had migrated from Mr. Peniston's bedroom, and the magenta ‘flock’ wall-paper, of a pattern dear to the early ‘sixties, was hung with large steel engravings of an anecdotic character. Lily had tried to mitigate this charmless background by a few frivolous touches, in the shape of a lace-bedecked toilet table and a little painted desk surrounded

by photographs; but the futility of the attempt struck her as she looked about the room. (86)

Lily cannot change the oppressiveness of either her aunt's home or her room in it unless she is permitted to decorate both according to her own sensibilities. Thus, her aunt's home is not a home for her, as it does not allow her to experience any sense of comfort, solace, or beauty.

While the homes in which she visits are more modern and more beautiful than her aunt's, Lily is equally unhappy with these interiors. She does take comfort in the luxurious rooms, such as the one she often stays in at Bellomont, Judy and Gus Trenor's suburban home in Rhinebeck.¹²⁷ Lily freely admits that she values money and luxury; she knows "she was not made for mean and shabby surroundings, for the squalid compromises of luxury. Her whole being dilated in an atmosphere of luxury; it was the background she required, the only climate she could breathe in. But the luxury of others was not what she wanted" (*HM* 23).

Living in her aunt's home, Lily begins to consider what it means to own a home of one's own. At first she contemplates the concept of home only in terms of how she would decorate and adorn her own home. Gradually, Lily moves beyond decoration. She begins to consider what it would mean to own her own home, one that would allow her to live life on her own terms rather than constantly conforming to societal expectations and others' perceptions of her. In such a place, Lily would be able to put an end to her sense of homelessness and her interstitial existence. Lily does want to escape her interstitiality, and she seems to believe that she will only be able to do so when she has a space of her own. Lily covets a setting that is suited to her tastes, one that she has designed for herself. Amidst the ugliness of her room in her aunt's house, which she tries to "mitigate" with a "few frivolous touches," Lily imagines again and again how she would decorate her own home:

an apartment which should surpass the complicated luxury of her friends' surroundings by the whole extent of that artistic sensibility which made her feel herself their superior; in which every tint and line should combine to

enhance her beauty and give distinction to her leisure. (*HM* 86)

In his reading of the interior spaces in Lily's life, Clubbe analyzes this passage, and he focuses on Lily's hatred of her aunt's décor and her belief that her taste is superior to her friends. He, and most other critics, neglect to recognize Wharton's use of the word "apartment." I contend that this word is significant because it reveals something about Lily's need for independence. Lily does not want a large house, a sumptuous townhouse, or a grand mansion, but a simple apartment, "which should surpass the complicated luxury of her friends'" homes. Lily longs for a small space of her own that is richly but simply designed. While she does assert that her home would reflect her own beauty, she also admits that she does not need a large, opulent home, which she could only obtain through marriage. Her desire for an apartment, one not unlike Selden's, stresses that she has no aspirations to marry; she merely wants a space of her own, one in which she does not have to conform to someone else's perceptions of her or compromise herself. As Emily J. Orlando asserts, Lily's refusal to compromise is best seen in her refusal to marry; Lily "will not accept marriage to a man she finds undesirable in order to put food on her table, at the very least, and to maintain the society life for which she has been bred, at the very best" (57). But her absolute unwillingness to compromise makes it difficult for her to achieve the type of space she so desperately desires.

At the time *The House of Mirth* was published, apartments were still "a relatively new phenomenon in New York as in other large American cities" (Clubbe 546). As Elizabeth Collins Cromley recounts in *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments*, apartment houses confounded Americans' conception of a home: apartments "straddled the line between the familiar forms of public and private buildings" (2). Historically, houses had composed the city's private architecture, while civic, commercial, and religious buildings made up the public realm. Apartment houses, however, "challenged clear boundaries between the home as a private house and the civic and commercial, even the street, as the public realm. In an apartment house, where some public spaces and many private spaces had to coexist, the boundaries and meaning of public

and private were always in negotiation” (2). Cromley cites this as among the primary reasons why so many members of the middle class resisted moving into apartment houses; they further they believed that apartment houses were no different from tenement housing and were, thus, “lower class” (2). As Dolores Hayden recounts, prior to the 1860s, “most middle-class and upper-class families considered the detached house or the row house the only socially respectable habitations” (72). It may have been acceptable for lower-class workers to live in “crowded tenements, with several families to a floor, but . . . before 1860 ‘it would have been unthinkable for a family of even modest social aspirations to live in anything but a private dwelling, however humble such a house might be’”¹²⁸ (Alpern as cited by Hayden 72). The other housing option, particularly for young married couples whom “could not afford a home of their own,” was a boarding house (Gamber 20). As historian Wendy Gamber notes, however, in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, boarding houses were often seen as disreputable locations and as breeding grounds for “vice” (7). While this negative stereotype failed to account for the many respectable boarding houses throughout the city that provided homes for bachelors, newlyweds, and single women alike, the stereotype against boarding houses became so pervasive that many middle-class individuals likened them to “the squalid tenements of the urban poor” (5).

Rising property prices following the Civil War as well as “changes in the use of a house, in the location of houses in a growing city,” and in the cost of managing a house in Manhattan, however, made it increasingly difficult for the average middle class family to own a private home (Cromley 11); thus, many members of the middle-class were forced to consider alternatives to the traditional private home. As a result, many developers began designing apartment houses with middle class families specifically in mind. Architectural historian Andrew Alpern notes that “many apartment houses were erected for former private-home dwellers” on the Upper West Side of Manhattan (6). In order to attract buyers, builders “attempted to show that living in [apartments] would have all of the advantages of living in a private house as well as many amenities not available elsewhere” (6). Builders also had to convince potential residents that an

apartment made living in the city feasible and affordable without “the inconvenience of a private house” or without compromising privacy; this included offering apartments with “water-filtration systems, central vacuum-cleaning machinery, central refrigeration plants, . . . built-in wall safes, and telephone switchboard services for both local and long-distance calls” (6).

At the end of the 1860s, “before any major flat buildings were erected in New York, middle- [and upper-] class residents were known to be biased against them,” but “in [a] very few years, flat buildings seemed to be widely accepted” (Cromley 6). Builders quickly realized that potential renters would want their apartments “to show their friends that they had risen in the world” (Alpern 7). Thus, they began designing larger apartments with separate dining rooms, larger bedrooms, and better floor plans. With these changes in design, middle- and upper-class residents began to view apartments as desirable—and less expensive—alternatives to the private house. “The fact that apartment houses were among the appropriate dwellings for the genteel is shown” with the publication of *Phillips’ Elite Directory of Private Families*, which was published yearly beginning in 1874 (Cromley 6). The directory, which Cromley describes as the type of book a “middle-class woman of the era” might take with her as she made social calls, listed “the addresses of individuals who lived in both grand and small apartment buildings, in hotels, and in private houses” (6). That everyone in the directory was classified as “genteel” affirmed that members of the social elite were now living in apartment houses and viewed them as viable alternatives to the private home.

As members of the middle- and upper-class moved into apartment houses, so too did bachelors. By 1870, some 125,000 bachelors were living in New York, and they “constituted a group acknowledged to have more active social lives than the traditional family” (Cromley 115); thus, they needed appropriate living quarters. Many bachelors lived in hotels, but most found them too expensive. The less expensive alternative, the boarding house, was deemed “an unacceptable alternative for those who valued privacy” (115). Builders began designing apartments specifically for bachelors; such apartments included a “suite of rooms scaled to the

needs of a single person . . . consisting of only a parlor, a bedroom, a bath, and closets.” As most bachelors “took their meals in clubs or restaurants, or with friends,” there was little need to include a kitchen (115).¹²⁹ It was acceptable, then, for unmarried men to live on their own as early as the 1870s, and there was an entire building program designed to meet their housing needs. In contrast, single women had significantly fewer options when it came to apartment living.

Apartment buildings for single women were not unheard of in New York. As early as the 1850s, philanthropists and social reformers had begun designing what they termed collective dwellings such as the Working Women’s Home.¹³⁰ This home, and others like it, were designed for working women or, as published in the *New York Times* announcing the opening of the home called them, “the poor female operatives” of New York (“Working Women’s” n.pag.). The home provided approximately 500 women “with a bed in a dormitory setting, with curtains rather than walls for privacy. On the main floor were parlors, a reading room, a laundry, and a common dining room, which served meals paid for by the week along with the rent” (Cromley 112). While buildings such as the Working Women’s Home became increasingly popular throughout New York during the last half of the nineteenth century, there were virtually no buildings designed for single, “working women who could afford to maintain a middle-class style of life”¹³¹ (112). Cromley cites the fact that, even by the 1870s, “young, respectable women did not have society’s blessing to make independent homes of their own,” as explanation for the lack of apartments for women (114). Further, while the bachelors of New York’s social elite, such as Selden, could take apartments in buildings designed specifically for them, their female counterparts could not. Single women of Lily and Selden’s social set were expected to move from their parents’ homes directly into their husbands’ homes. If both of their parents died before they married, like Lily’s did, they were taken in by other relatives rather than living on their own. Thus, women’s options for independent living were severely limited, especially if they wished to maintain respectable positions in society.¹³²

For Lily, living independently is simply not an option. In order to maintain her position in society and on the marriage market, she must maintain a residence with her aunt, which, in her mind, reinforces her interstitial status. Lily is able to preserve her reputation by living with her aunt, but she is not able to live her life on her own terms. While Wharton clearly acknowledges the social circumstances Lily would face if she chose to live on her own, she also offers Lily two models for independent living: Lawrence Selden and Gerty Farish. Both Selden and Gerty live alone, support themselves, and maintain connections to Lily's upper-middle class social set, all of which seem to describe Lily's desires. It is apparent from the beginning of the novel, however, that Lily views Gerty's lifestyle with disdain and Selden's with envy.

Gerty Farish is introduced to readers in the novel's first chapter. Selden holds her up as an example of a young women living alone when Lily remarks how "delicious" it must be "to have a place . . . all to one's self" (*HM* 8). When Lily reminds Selden that only governesses or widows, "not girls—not poor, miserable marriageable girls," have flats of their own, Selden reminds her that Gerty lives alone (8). Lily responds, "a little unkindly, 'But I said *marriageable*—and besides, she has a horrid little place, and no maid, and such queer things to eat. Her cook does the washing and the food tastes of soap. I should hate that, you know'" (8).¹³³ Thus, in the novel's first few pages, Wharton outlines what sort of life Lily does not want. She clearly longs to have a space all to herself, but she is unwilling to live like Gerty does in order to possess such a space. Lily fails to see that she and Gerty are more alike than they are different, and her inability to recognize Gerty's lifestyle as a viable means to achieving the independence she so desires foreshadows her own eventual failure.

Like Lily, Gerty is an orphan, and she is essentially penniless. Gerty also has some connection to Lily and Selden's social set, although Wharton never specifically explains what that connection is.¹³⁴ The similarities between Lily and Gerty end there, at least as far as Lily is concerned. Whereas Lily is "radiant" and "vivid," Gerty is "fatally poor and dingy" (*HM* 5, 71). Whereas Lily has a wealthy aunt who takes her in, Gerty supports herself by running a charity

that provides housing for young women who are out of work or “in need of rest” (87). Whereas Lily is clinging to a lifestyle that she cannot afford and brings her little comfort, Gerty seems quite content living on her own and only being occasionally invited to society functions. This last difference is the most significant, as it proves that a woman in Lily’s position—or one that is remarkably similar—need not live out her life in interstitial spaces, that she can direct the outcome of her life herself. Gerty’s life, then, can be seen as a viable alternative to Lily’s, as she chooses to make the best of her circumstances while Lily seems unable to diverge from the path she has been on her entire life.

Gerty’s ability to direct her own fate is due, in large part, to her having a space of her own. Although Lily describes Gerty’s apartment as “a horrid little place” (*HM* 8), the small apartment, which includes a sitting room, a small kitchen, and a bedroom, affords Gerty all the privileges that Lily longs for but does not possess. In her modestly decorated home, “compact of enamel paint and ingenuity,” Gerty can come and go as she pleases, entertain whom she chooses, and be alone whenever she desires (122). Unlike Lily’s starkly decorated room in her aunt’s house, Gerty’s apartment actually reflects her personality and taste. As Selden observes during a visit there, Gerty “utilized every inch of her small quarters,” displaying her “rosy . . . candle-shades” and “her grandmother’s egg-shell cups” along side her collection of framed photographs, which includes a recent portrait of Lily (122, 123). Gerty’s home exudes warmth and comfort; it is clearly meant to be seen as a space in which Gerty can take refuge from the world. Indeed, Selden even tells Gerty that her home stands in contrast to his own, which he describes as the home of a “poor bachelor” (123). That Lily ridicules such a warm, welcoming space suggests that she cannot see past her disdain for Gerty’s lifestyle to recognize that Gerty has everything she wants: freedom and independence from the stifling role she has played her entire life.

It is important to reiterate the differences between Gerty and Lily. Gerty seems to have no inheritance upon which to live, while Lily does draw a small income from the money she inherited upon her mother’s death. Although Gerty is intelligent and dependable, she lacks Lily’s

beauty, grace, and vitality, three traits that keep Lily in the good grace's of her peers. Finally, Gerty has no wealthy relatives willing to support her. Although she remains uninvolved in Lily's daily life, Mrs. Peniston does allow Lily to live with her and gives her money occasionally. Her presence in Lily's life, however minute, guarantees Lily's membership in their social set, which she would lose if she lived alone as Gerty does. As Lily's observation to Selden suggests, a woman like Gerty may be invited to the occasional party or social event, but such a woman is not seen as marriage material (*HM* 8). By summarily dismissing Gerty and her lifestyle, Lily seemingly does not recognize that Gerty, in many respects, is much happier and more fulfilled than she is. Lily also cannot see that Gerty understands her in way that no one else in the novel does.

Initially, Wharton portrays Gerty as completely infatuated by Lily and her mode of living. Gerty does seem to view Lily as little more than an object to be admired, as she consistently remarks upon Lily's beauty. When they meet at Grace van Osburg's wedding, an event to which Gerty is thrilled to have been invited, Gerty tells Lily, "I never saw you look so lovely! You look as if something delightful had just happened to you!" (*HM* 70). Gerty expresses even more admiration for Lily after she convinces several of her friends to make large donations to Gerty's charity for young women (105). But Gerty's interest in Lily goes beyond admiration. She is genuinely concerned for Lily's welfare, and she repeatedly tells Selden that she dislikes how Lily is treated. Her frank declaration that "it makes me so angry when I hear her called cold and conceited" emphasizes that she cares for Lily (105). As Cynthia Griffin Wolff asserts, Gerty appears to be "generally beguiled by the glamorous pageantry in which she cannot partake," but she also understand Lily's "emotional inwardness" that other, including Selden, choose to ignore ("Beautiful Death" 282). In fact, Gerty seems to realize what Lily herself does not: that Lily's desire for independence and luxury reinforce the interstitial nature of her life. Gerty further recognizes that Lily is unable to shape the direction of her life on her own, telling Selden, "You know how dependent she has always been on ease and luxury—how she has hated

what was shabby and ugly and uncomfortable. She can't help it—she was brought up with those ideas, and has never been able to find her way out of them" (*HM* 211). Thus, Gerty understands that Lily cannot find a way out on her own. Without the help and guidance of true friends, Lily will continue to be unable to negotiate her interstitial existence.

In many ways, Selden is more like Lily than Gerty. Mary McAleer Balkun notes that Lily and Selden both "are single and of an age when most of those they know are married; both have no immediate family; both are fastidious in their personal habits and must be surrounded by beauty; and both hover on the fringe of wealthy New York society" (73). As Balkun's description suggests, Lily and Selden both live interstitial lives as neither can easily—or willingly—define the role they play in their social set. They are neither poor nor wealthy; neither wholly active in directing their own lives nor completely passive; and neither willing to conform nor able to reject society's expectations of them outright. Wharton even goes so far as to directly compare Selden to Lily at one point: "he was, as much as Lily, the victim of his environment" (*HM* 120). Wharton argues that women are not the only ones who live in interstitial spaces, struggling to reconcile their desires with their upbringing and environment. Wharton goes on to suggest that Selden's parents have influenced his view of himself and his environment almost as much as Mrs. Bart influenced Lily.

Wharton offers the Seldens as direct foils for the Barts, especially Mrs. Bart. Both families struggled to keep themselves afloat financially, but while the Barts consistently lived beyond their means, the Seldens, particularly Mrs. Selden, managed to create "an atmosphere where restricted means were felt only as a check on aimless profusion" (*HM* 120). Rather than emphasize luxury as a necessity, as Mrs. Bart does, Mrs. Selden teaches Selden "that there are as many different ways of going without money as of spending it . . . It was from her that he inherited his detachment from the sumptuary side of life" (120-21). Yet, as Wolff suggests in her essay "Lily Bart and the Beautiful Death," their "elegant poverty" has instilled in Selden "a moral finickiness that is every bit as divorced from reality as Lily's" (328). Indeed, Selden and his

parents are “self-deceived” as “they suffer from the sin of pride” (328). They believe that their way of life, their seeming preference for beauty over money makes them superior to those among their social set who follow the latest fashions. Selden grows up thinking that a “life fully led must necessarily satisfy both his own” sense of moral and artistic superiority and “the indulgence of his keenest sensitivities” (328). Selden does not realize that “these two appetites” are “mutually contradictory” (328). Selden believes himself to be different from everyone else in New York society because he values beauty over money and thinks beauty can be achieved without money. Selden repeatedly ignores the fact that his participation in New York society—and his fascination with Lily—are at direct odds with his view of beauty. He openly disdains the material excess that he witnesses, yet he is wholly unable to stop participating in the society that he scorns as doing so makes him feel morally superior to those he scorns. His refusal to separate himself totally from the social set that he simultaneously scorns and enjoys places him in an interstitial position. His position, however, is markedly different from Lily’s because Selden’s gender enables him to negotiate the interstitiality of his life in ways that are not available to Lily.

Just as Gerty is able, in large part, to control her own fate because she has her own home, so too is Selden. Selden makes his home in a building is named The Benedick, which alludes to Shakespeare’s perennial bachelor from *Much Ado About Nothing*. By invoking Benedick, Wharton tacitly informs her readers that Selden has settled into “an untroubled bachelorhood” (Kaye 165). That Wharton sets much of the opening chapter in Selden’s apartment immediately foregrounds Lily’s desire both for the freedom that Selden’s bachelorhood affords him and her longing for such a simple, unaffected space.

As Selden “usher[s] her into a slip of a hall hung with old prints,” Lily notices “the letters and notes heaped on the table among his gloves and sticks; then she found herself in a small library, dark but cheerful, with its walls of books, a pleasantly faded Turkey rug, a littered desk” (HM 8). After surveying Selden’s home, Lily settles “into one of the shabby leather chairs . . . lean[ing] back in a luxury of discontent” (8). Selden’s apartment represents the ideal space she

can never possess; it may be small and cluttered, but it reflects Selden's personality. Lily revels in the fact that Selden has been able to decorate the space in a way that brings him comfort and aesthetic pleasure. As Balkun asserts, Lily "would like to have a room of her own, a place where she can arrange the furniture and be alone" (75). Renée Somers extends Balkun's assessment, stating that "Delighted by his comfortable bachelor pad . . . Lily equates aesthetic pleasure and moral well-being" (134). Indeed, Lily expresses this belief quite plainly, telling Selden, "It must be pure bliss to arrange the furniture just as one likes . . . If I could only do over my aunt's drawing-room, I know I should be a better woman" (*HM* 8). Possessing a space of her own would ensure both her "aesthetic pleasure," her "emotional and moral well-being," and her liberation from societal convention (Somers 134, 135). That Lily believes that Selden is able to achieve each of these things primarily because he is a man emphasizes how trapped she feels by her position in society.

Lily's sense of entrapment is best represented by her awareness that she is only permitted to access what Somers defines as "policed spaces" (135). Lily's room in her aunt's home can be seen as "policed" because it denies Lily "the opportunity to fully express herself or feed her creative and intellectual appetite" (135). Unlike Selden, Lily has no access to any space that will "eradicate the hunger for independence that plagues her" (135). While Somers's characterization of Lily's room as well as the various other guest rooms she occupies as policed is accurate, I want to extend her definition beyond spaces that are ostensibly private. Virtually every space Lily occupies is policed, including the interstitial spaces she inhabits. I contend that these interstitial spaces which include her aunt's drawing-room and the Trenors' entryway, are policed because Lily is largely unable to use the interstitial nature of these spaces to empower herself in any prolonged way. She is able to locate moments of power in these spaces, but, whereas Frado and Linda Brent are able to extend the power they claim at the woodpile and in the garret, respectively, Lily is not. That she cannot translate her power beyond interstitial spaces, that she is unable to claim a space for herself, even a metaphoric one, foreshadows Lily's eventual

downfall. Before discussing her downfall and the role interstitial spaces play in it, I want to examine briefly two interstitial spaces in which Lily is able to claim some power.

The drawing room of Mrs. Peniston's home is one interstitial location in which Lily empowers herself. I define the drawing room as an interstitial space because it is neither completely public nor private. Although seen as somewhat less formal than parlors (Clark 40), drawing rooms were still primarily used for social visits. Thus, they were typically located on the main floor of private homes, putting them in closing proximity to the more public spaces of the home, including the parlor, dining room, and foyer. A dining room is public then because all the inhabitants of a home, from the mistress of the house to the servants, have access to it and because it is removed from the private rooms of the house; it can be seen as private, however, because it can be closed off from the rest of the house, enabling intimate discussions. It is in the drawing room of Mrs. Peniston's home that Lily receives Mrs. Haffen, a char-woman who used to work at the Benedick, Selden's apartment building.

Mrs. Haffen calls on Lily in an attempt to blackmail her. She saw Lily leaving Selden's apartment the day Lily and Selden met at Grand Central, and she has since found a bundle of letters in Selden's trash that she believes Lily wrote to him.¹³⁵ That Lily receives Mrs. Haffen in the drawing room, "beyond the earshot of the hovering parlour-maid" (*HM* 80), signals not only her wish to keep the visit private but also her forethought to remain within calling distance of the servants should she need any assistance. During the visit, Mrs. Haffen attempts to control the conversation, first by recounting the details of Lily's visit to Selden that September day and then by carefully lining the letters up on a table so that Lily can determine their contents. Lily maintains control, however, by using the interstitial nature of the drawing room to her advantage.

Lily does this, first, by closing the drawing room door, but she never invites Mrs. Haffen to sit, which can be seen as a lapse in manners on Lily's part. By not asking her to sit, Lily effectively reminds Mrs. Haffen that she is not in control of this exchange. Lily tacitly informs her guest that she is in charge of the conversation and the space they are in, signaling that she will

not be manipulated. Lily further uses the space of the drawing room by frequently moving away from Mrs. Haffen to stand closer to the door, which suggests she is contemplating calling the parlour-maid to escort Mrs. Haffen from the house. She continually circles Mrs. Haffen, speaking low enough that only Mrs. Haffen can hear her but loud enough that the servants will remain aware of their presence in the house. Her actions keep Mrs. Haffen on the defensive and serve to remind her that even though she has these very personal objects in her possession Lily is very much in control. Ultimately, Lily does purchase the letters, but only after a lengthy standoff, which forces Mrs. Haffen to accept the price Lily offers rather than the “exorbitant sum” she initially demanded (*HM* 83). Lily succeeds because she maintains complete control of the space they occupy. In fact, Mrs. Haffen finally agrees to accept Lily’s offer because, as she glances around the dark drawing room, “she had a vision of the elaborate machinery of revenge would a word of [Lily’s] might set in motion” (84). Had this exchange taken place in a space designated as specifically public or private, such as the parlor or even Mrs. Haffen’s home, Lily may have felt more threatened and agreed to Mrs. Haffen’s demands. She is empowered by the interstitial nature of the drawing room, however, and maintains control of both the space and the situation. Lily exhibits similar control over the interstitial spaces of Gus Trenor’s entryway and hallway.

Lily’s relationship with the Trenors is best described as complex. She considers Judy Trenor to be one of her closest friends, but she seems to resent Judy’s interference in her life. Among the wealthiest on the New York social scene, Judy always includes Lily in her plans and frequently invites Lily to stay at Bellomont, the Trenors’ country home. Judy also gives Lily small gifts of a “gown or a trinket” with some regularity as she “knew it must be ‘horrid’ for poor Lily to have to stop to consider whether she could afford real lace on her petticoats” (*HM* 64, 61). Judy does not—and Wharton suggests that she cannot—truly grasp Lily’s financial situation: “The daily nibble of small temptations to expenditure were trials as far out of [Judy’s] experience as the domestic problems of the char-woman” (61-2). Thus, Lily simultaneously values Judy’s friendship and resents Judy for her wealth. In contrast to her close friendship with Judy, Lily has

no such relationship with Judy's husband. Lily only knows Trenor because of Judy. In fact, Lily finds Trenor, who is rather large, physically repugnant and frequently marvels that "some women thought him handsome!" (64). Despite her dislike of him, Lily does speak of her financial troubles during one of her visits to Bellomont.¹³⁶ Flattered to have been taken into Lily's confidence, Trenor convinces her to let him invest some of her money for her (67). Lily, who is "too genuinely ignorant of the manipulations of the stock-market to understand his technical explanations, or even perhaps to perceive that certain points in them were slurred," willingly agrees (68). Her decision immediately alleviates her stress over money, but it also places her under Trenor's power, a fact of which she seems to be completely oblivious.

Trenor keeps his promise, and Lily soon receives what she believes is a dividend cheque for one thousand dollars, which enables her to pay off her jeweler and dressmaker and even to place new orders (*HM* 68). Trenor continues to send Lily cheques, but with each check, he becomes more demanding of Lily's time. He tries to meet with her privately and even attends events he would otherwise avoid, such as the Stepney-Van Osburgh wedding, in an attempt to see her. Trenor's behavior suggests that he believes Lily must repay his favor to her; however, Lily understands that Trenor has been "speculating with her own money, and that she consequently owed him no more than the gratitude which such a trifling service demanded" (69). Lily, thus, believes Trenor is overstepping the boundaries of friendship by publicly seeking out her company and begins to avoid him. Despite Trenor's behavior, she still cares for Judy, and she, therefore, accepts an invitation to visit her at her Fifth Avenue home late one evening. Every moment of this visit highlights Lily's interstitial existence as she moves through a series of interstitial spaces that she barely manages to maintain control of.

Lily arrives at the Trenors' shortly after ten "by hansom cab," and she waits "long enough on the doorstep to wonder that Judy's presence in town was not signalized by a greater promptness in admitting her" (*HM* 111). She is finally "let into the shrouded hall" by a servant, and she is greeted by Trenor, who immediately escorts her to his den (111). Each of these

spaces, the hansom cab, the doorstep, and the hall, are interstitial spaces, as they are neither wholly public nor private. The cab enables Lily to see and, if she chooses, to be seen; the doorstep serves to transition her from the public world of the street to the privacy of the Trenors' home; and the hall separates the public and private spaces of the home. Each carries Lily farther into the Trenors' home, where Lily quickly learns that Judy remained in the country and had asked Trenor to cancel Lily's visit. Trenor, however, uses Judy's absence to meet with Lily alone and to demand to know how she plans to repay her debt to him. Lily soon realizes that she has been manipulated and that she is largely under Trenor's control. The interstitial nature of these spaces does, however, offer Lily some power as she moves through them. So long as she remains in spaces that are somewhat public, she can remain in control of her environment and even Trenor's behavior. But once Lily enters the private, masculine space of Trenor's den,¹³⁷ she forfeits much of her power.

Once Lily is aware of Judy's absence, Lily realizes she is in a compromising position and tries to leave quickly and quietly.¹³⁸ Unfortunately, by the time she realizes Judy is not home, she is already entering Trenor's den. Removed from the interstitiality of the hallway and the entryway, Lily's only choice is to avoid a scene and hope that she can regain control of the situation. As Trenor accuses her of making of fool of him by accepting his money and then not "playing fair," Lily does regain control by carefully positioning herself within his den (*HM* 114).

In an attempt to keep some distance between herself and Trenor, Lily initially remains in the den's threshold. After Trenor takes her hand and draws "her toward a low seat by the hearth," Lily "stopped and freed herself quietly" (*HM* 112). Lily then stands "composedly in the middle of the room," and "her slight smile seemed to put an ever increasing distance between" them (112). Lily's attempt to stand apart from Trenor, however, only serves to increase his anger as he demands an explanation for her dismissive treatment of him: "I want to know just where you and I stand. Hang it, the man who pays for dinner is generally allowed to have a seat at the table" (114). As Lily slowly begins to understand that Trenor expects sexual favors in exchange for the

money he has given her, she wants to retreat, to physically escape his insults. On some level, however, Lily realizes that the only power she still has in this situation is her dignity. When Trenor finally pauses in the long list of insults he levels at her, Lily calmly says, “I am here alone with you . . . What more have you to say?” (116). With this simple question, Lily tacitly reminds Trenor of their positions in society—he is, after all, a well-respected, married man, and she is a single woman and a close friend of his wife’s. Trenor immediately backs down, and he walks back to the fireplace, leaving Lily alone in the center of the room. Lily seizes control of the situation and commands Trenor to call her a cab and to escort her out of his home. As they pass through the same series of interstitial spaces—the hallway, the entryway, and the hansom cab—it becomes clear that Lily has regained control of her emotions and their relationship.¹³⁹ Indeed, Lily herself does not know where she gets the strength to leave without causing a scene:

Whence the strength came to her she knew not; but an insistent voice warned her that she must leave the house openly, and nerved her, in the hall before the hovering care-taker, to exchange light words with Trenor, and charge him with the usual messages for Judy, while all the while she shook with inward loathing.

(117)

Lily realizes she must leave the Trenors’ home without drawing notice to herself and in full view of the care-taker. If she leaves surreptitiously or without the care-taker present, she knows her visit will surely be the talk of their social set the next morning.

This scene marks the moment Lily begins to fully grasp just how far she has been forced to withdraw into interstitial spaces to exist. Further, Lily finally seems to understand that there is no space in which she can protect herself from the demands of her society. For the remainder of the novel, Lily struggles to maintain her position in society without compromising her dignity. She moves through a series of spaces that serves to highlight her interstitial existence of which she seems both unwilling and unable to escape. Unlike in her exchange with Trenor, she is

unable to empower herself in any of these spaces and she falls victim to both the interstitiality of the spaces and the constraints of society.

Following her confrontation with Trenor, Lily determines that she “must find a way out of the slough into which she had stumbled” (*HM* 134). She realizes that her only hope of preventing Trenor from speaking publicly about her debt is to repay him as quickly as possible. She, therefore, decides to ask her aunt for the money, which totals almost nine thousand dollars. Lily approaches her aunt in the sitting room, the lone spaces that Mrs. Peniston “received her rare confidences” (135). Lily has little choice but to ask for the money in this space, and the setting serves to emphasize that the limited power Lily has claimed through her interstitial existence is quickly slipping through her fingers. Indeed, to ask her aunt for the money to repay Trenor, Lily must shed her carefully constructed image. She must tell her aunt she is not the quiet, decorous young woman Mrs. Peniston believed her to be; she must admit that she overspends and plays cards, two things that Mrs. Peniston considers to be unpardonable sins. Mrs. Peniston reacts predictably, telling Lily, “you are old enough to manage your own affairs . . . I consider that you *are* disgraced, Lily: disgraced by your conduct far more than by its results” (136-7).¹⁴⁰ With her aunt’s dismissal of her, Lily is forced to rely increasingly upon her interstitial status to survive, but rather than claiming power, as Frado and Linda Brent claimed power through their similar positions, Lily loses any power she had, as she is further victimized by her status and her environment.

A few hours after her aunt refuses to help Lily pay off her debts, she receives a telegram from Bertha Dorset, which reads “Sailing unexpectedly tomorrow. Will you join us on a cruise in Mediterranean?” (*HM* 142). Lily sees the invitations as a way to escape New York and her financial burdens. Thus, she immediately decides to go, never stopping to contemplate Bertha’s motive for inviting her.

Europe has always been a place of refuge for Lily. She and her mother spent many summers there, and they lived there for long periods following Mr. Bart’s death. In Europe, Lily

is able to use her interstitial position to her advantage, as most of the Europeans she befriends find her charming and beautiful. People like the Duchess of Belthshire and Lady Skiddaw seem to care little about her finances or her position in New York society (*HM* 146-9). Lily's trip with the Dorsets, however, only serves to reinforce her interstitial position in society and her inability to gain any real power from that position. Lily's inability to gain power from her interstitiality is due in large part to how Bertha treats her.

While Lily seemingly believes that Bertha has invited her out of friendship, Bertha did not invite Lily out of such pure motives. Bertha has begun an affair with Ned Silverton, who is also a guest of the Dorsets. Lily's sole purpose, as Carry Fisher tells Selden while lunching with him in Monte Carlo, is to distract Bertha's husband, George, so he does not become aware of Bertha's affair. Lily, however, seems wholly unaware of her role in the affair, so unaware, in fact, that she makes no attempt to use Bertha's infidelities to her advantage. Carry tells Selden, "[George's] as blind as he is jealous; and of course Lily's present business is to keep him blind. A clever woman might know just the right moment to tear off the bandage; but Lily isn't clever in that way, and when George does open his eyes, she'll probably contrive not to be in his line of vision" (*HM* 148). Once again, Lily fails to recognize when she is in a position to improve her situation. Unfortunately, this is the one time Lily cannot afford to make any mistakes. Given her precarious financial situation, she desperately needs to use her interstitial position to her benefit. If, as Carry suggests, she helps George Dorset become aware of his wife's affair at the right moment, Lily would be able to distance herself from her role in the scandal while positioning herself as a viable second wife, thus benefiting from the dissolution of her friends' marriage. Instead, Lily remains oblivious to the opportunity and she becomes a victim to Bertha's scheme.

In order to keep George from learning about her relationship with Silverton, Bertha contrives to have Lily and George spend a night alone together traveling from Nice to Monte Carlo where the Dorsets' yacht is docked. Bertha quickly initiates a rumor that they left intentionally Nice without her, implying that Lily and George are having an affair. Although

everyone in their set knows about Bertha's affair but George, they all side with Bertha, who has more money and, thus, more power than Lily. Lily is forced to return to New York as a scorned woman, with no money and no friends. Within days of Lily's return, Mrs. Peniston dies, having left her home and most of her fortune to Grace, which everyone in the family assumed Lily would inherit. To Lily, Mrs. Peniston left ten thousand dollars, effectively disinheriting her. Lily realizes immediately that she is "utterly alone," as her friends will follow both Bertha and Mrs. Peniston's lead (*HM* 177). Lily will be shut out of New York society and quickly forgotten.

The novel's final chapters details Lily's struggle to survive. She takes several positions as a private secretary,¹⁴¹ first with the nouveau riche Gormers and then the blatantly vulgar Norma Hatch (*HM* 185, 212).¹⁴² When she leaves her position with Mrs. Hatch,¹⁴³ she is forced to find work at a milliner's shop that many of her former friends frequent. She moves from the Gormers' home to Mrs. Hatch's suite at the Emporium Hotel to a boarding-house (203, 212, 224).

Ironically, her room in the boarding-house is the one space she has inhabited that could be viewed as her own. Indeed, she initially savors "the solitude of a hall bedroom in a house where she could come and go unremarked among the other workers. For a while she had been sustained by [her] desire for privacy and independence," but she begins "to feel acutely the ugliness and discomfort of her surroundings. The day's task done, she dreaded to return to her narrow room, with its blotched wall-paper and shabby paint" (224-5). But as much as she hates the boarding-house, Lily seems to believe she is living more honestly than ever before. She has, as she informs Selden in their final meeting which takes place in his apartment, realized that the independence she has clung to was largely a figment of her imagination. She claim, "I can hardly be said to have had had an independent existence. I was just a screw or a cog in the great machine I called life, and when I dropped out of it I found I was of no use to anyone else. What can one do when one finds that one only fits into one hole? One must get back to it or be thrown out into the rubbish heap" (240). Lily finally seems to accept her role in her move down the social ladder, but she also recognizes that "the great machine" of life could not create a space to accommodate

someone like her: a beautiful, vibrant woman seeking a space of her own while trying to maintain ties to society. Before Lily leaves Selden's apartment, she drops Bertha's letters to him in his fireplace, thus ensuring she has no way back to her former life.

Lily returns to her boarding-house to find a letter containing a cheque for "the full amount of Mrs. Peniston's legacy" (*HM* 247). Lily immediately sets about paying off her debts, including the sizable amount she still owes Gus Trenor. Once she completes this emotionally draining task, she realizes she has "barely enough to live on for the next three or four months" (247). With this realization, Lily physically shudders, but not from her material poverty. She shudders at the

Sense of deeper impoverishment—of an inner destitution compared to which outward conditions dwindled into insignificance. It was indeed miserable to be poor . . . But there was something more miserable still—it was the clutch of solitude at her heart, the sense of being swept like a stray uprooted growth down the heedless current of years . . . of being something rootless and ephemeral, mere spin-drift of the whirling surface of existence, without anything to which the poor little tentacles of self could cling . . . (sic 248)

Lily, then, can adapt to her material circumstances, but she cannot envision herself completely alone in a space that brings her no sense of permanency, that reflects nothing of her inner self, and that denies her any connection to those she loves. She needs something to ground her, and without a role to play, even one that demands she keep much of herself hidden and live in interstitial spaces, Lily feels lost; she feels that she has neither a place of her own nor a means by which to claim her identity. As she comes to terms with the complete solitude that will now mark her life, Lily is overwhelmed by a desire to sleep, not having slept for several nights. She takes a dose of chloral to help her sleep, and even though she is already taking the highest dose, she increases it, knowing that if "sleep came at all, it might be a sleep without waking" (250). That Lily takes the drug fully aware of the potential consequences suggests she is aware of her failure

to use her interstitial position to her advantage. She is also aware she has gone too far to change her course now, and thus, she is willing to accept the risk to rest. Indeed, Lily sleeps, and “she yield[s] to it” (251).

Through *The House of Mirth*, Wharton presents a woman who “cannot survive in a world that denies her a space of her own” (Somers 135). As Somers contends, “No matter how hard [Lily] tries she cannot find a space” that is suited to her need for comfort and her desire for independence (135). Lily, thus, lives an interstitial existence, which does enable her to live the life she is accustomed to while maintaining some sense of independence. She is not able, however, to mediate the limited power she experiences in these spaces, which include entryways, train stations, and drawing rooms, beyond the confines of these spaces. Whereas Phelps’s Avis is able to embrace her interstitial existences and realize she experiences intellectual and creative freedom in the interstitial spaces she occupies, Wharton’s Lily wants a more permanent space of her own. Like Wilson’s Frado and Jacobs’s Brent, Lily wants a home of her own, and she is prepared to continue living an interstitial life only if doing so will insure she has the type of space she desires. She is remarkably unlike Frado and Brent, however, in that she is unable to use the power she experiences in these spaces to her advantage. While both Frado and Brent use the power they claim in the various interstitial spaces they occupy and create to help them direct their own lives, Lily fails to act similarly. Perhaps because she is older than either Frado or Brent or perhaps because her privileged childhood and adolescence have not prepared her for anything but a life of comfort and ease, Lily cannot adapt to her changed circumstances, even though the fact that she is earning her own money allows her to live her life on her own terms.

Although Wharton has Lily fail because she cannot adapt to her changed life or claim a space of her own, Wharton does not suggest that all women in similar positions will fall victim to the interstitiality of their lives. In fact, Wharton argues that women who are able to negotiate interstitial spaces, either architectural or metaphorical, to their advantage will not only claim

power beyond the interstitial spaces but will also succeed in finding a space of their own. Ellen Olenska of Wharton's 1920 novel *The Age of Innocence* is once such woman.

Like Lily, Ellen lives an interstitial existence as her position in life cannot be easily categorized. Ellen is a member of an old New York family, yet because she has lived most of her life in Europe, she is neither known to many New Yorkers nor is she familiar with the customs of New York society. Having recently left her husband, who is a notorious gambler and philanderer, Ellen's marital status highlights the interstitial nature of her life; she is not single, but she does not consider herself married either. Further, Ellen is neither financially independent, nor is she wholly dependent on either her husband or her family as she has some money of her own. Finally, Ellen's refusal to follow social convention coupled with her unwillingness to dismiss convention altogether is yet another marker of her interstitiality. Despite the many similarities between Ellen and Lily, there are several key differences, the most important of which is Ellen's ability to negotiate the interstitiality of her life to her advantage. Ellen negotiates through compromise: she manages to adhere to social and familial convention—or at least to not openly defy either—while securing her independence from her husband and claiming a space of her own. Ellen's first attempt at securing her own space is a failure, however.

When she first returns to New York, Ellen has been away for over a decade, since making her debut in society. In the intervening years, she has had an unhappy marriage to a Polish count, who she has left because of his many infidelities. She believes her New York family will welcome her back with open arms, completely unaware of how closely they follow social custom. Due in part to her husband's frequent absences, Ellen is accustomed to being on her own and making her own choices, regardless of society's opinion. Her independence is best represented her decision not to stay with family,¹⁴⁴ which is the appropriate choice for a married woman traveling without her husband. Instead, Ellen rents a home "far down West Twenty-third Street," which her family considers the outskirts of the city¹⁴⁵ (*Age* 57). Ellen's house has a "modest front," which embarrasses her family, but its interior is romantic and simple, much like Ellen

herself (57). With its “small slender tables of dark wood, a delicate little Greek bronze on the chimney-piece, and a stretch of red damask nailed on the discolored wallpaper behind a couple of Italian-looking pictures in old frames,” every aspect of Ellen’s home reflects her personality (59). As she tells Newland Archer, who is engaged to her cousin May Welland, “I like my little house . . . but I suppose what I like is the blessedness of being here, in my own country and my own town; and then, of being alone in it” (62). For Ellen, a home is the “physical expression” of herself and her desires (Somers 114). It is a space in which she can be herself, regardless of her family’s or society’s expectations of her. In fact, Ellen is willing to defy both society and her family if doing so means she neither has to return to her unfaithful husband nor has to give up having a space of her own. Ellen quickly realizes, however, that defying society and living life on her own terms may not be possible, especially if she stays in New York. If she divorces her husband, she will be cut off, emotionally and financially, from her family, making it impossible for her to have a home of her own. Ultimately, Ellen succeeds in maintaining a home of her own because she is willing to compromise, something Lily refuses to do.

Ellen compromises by following her family’s request that she not divorce her husband, which prevents the family from experiencing the public shame a divorce would generate. Ellen also ensures her place as a respectable woman in society by not divorcing the Count. Ellen makes this compromise because she realizes that she must conform in some ways if she is to maintain a connection with her family; as she tells Archer, “I suppose I’ve lived too independently; at any rate, I want to do what you all do—I want to feel cared for and safe” (*Age* 62). While Ellen does agree not to divorce her husband, she refuses to reconcile with him, which is what her family continually encourages her to do, or to give up living on her own. To maintain her independent lifestyle without further alienating herself from her family or New York society, Ellen makes one final compromise: she leaves New York for Paris, where social custom does not prohibit married women from establishing homes of their own. Ellen’s willingness to compromise, then, enables

her to claim agency over herself, to live life on her own terms while still receiving financial support from her family, and, most importantly, to possess a home of her own.

Through Ellen and Lily, Wharton argues that women must be prepared to compromise in order to achieve what they desire, especially if those desires are at odds with social conventions, as Ellen's and Lily's desire for homes of their own are. Ellen's willingness to compromise comes in part because she knows the reality of an extremely unhappy marriage. Ellen can accept compromise and living an interstitial life because she refuses to return to her husband. Lily wants to negotiate the interstitiality of her life, but only on her terms.

Lily is repeatedly presented with the means to improve both the material and spiritual circumstances of her life, either through marriage, inheritance, or blackmail. Lily refuses to marry because she knows, while marriage may ensure economic freedom, it will not guarantee her spiritual or intellectual freedom. She actually sees inheriting her aunt's estate as the most viable means of achieving the independence she wants without making any significant compromises; the false rumors surrounding her relationships with Gus Trenor and George Dorset, however, cause Mrs. Peniston to disown Lily, and Lily misses her chance to maintain her independence without compromising. Finally, Lily has the power to restore her position in New York society by using the letters¹⁴⁶ she purchased from Mrs. Haffen to blackmail Bertha Dorset.¹⁴⁷ But Lily refuses to resort to blackmail because she neither wants to hurt Selden nor does she want to compromise her own morality. Susan Goodman suggests "owning and yet not employing the means of Bertha's demise enhance Lily's sense of moral superiority and allows her to feel compassion for her formal rival"; Lily, is, however, "unable to profit from her keen social sensibilities" (56), as her refusal to use the letters to her advantage coupled with her insistence at repaying Gus Trenor ensures she will never be accepted back into her social set. Lily, then, refuses to take her last opportunity to negotiate her interstitial position to her advantage: she refuses to take what little power she has and use it to benefit herself at the expense of others. Lily

fails because she has no space of her own, but she has no space of her own because, unlike the other characters discussed, she cannot bring herself to compromise any part of herself.

5. CONCLUSION

[Frado] determined to flee. But where? Who would take her? Mrs. B. had always represented her ugly. Perhaps everyone thought her so. Then no one would take her. She was black, no one would love her. She might have to return, and then she would be more in her mistress's power than ever.

Harriet E. Wilson, *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*

The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble.

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Certain moods befell [Avis] that winter, from which [Philip] stood afar off. Sometimes, when the wild weather deterred her from the brisk walks which her sturdy, out-of-door habits had made a necessity to her, he found her pacing the house up and down, from attic to cellar, in a fitful, and what in a woman of less self-control, would have been a fretful way.

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Story of Avis*

How delicious to have a place like this all to one's self! What a miserable thing it is to be a woman!

Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth*

In each of these passages, the authors reveal something about their characters' relationship with and desire for space, whether the space they desire is physical or metaphorical. In *Our Nig*, Harriet E. Wilson has Frado want to escape the life of pain and abuse she has endured in the Bellmont home for most of her life. But, as a black woman who has no family, few friends to speak of, and no money of her own, Frado believes she has no place she can go where she will be safe or loved. She realizes leaving the Bellmonts does not guarantee she will have a better life as she has, quite literally, no where else to go. In her slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs concludes the final chapter with Linda Brent's declaration that her life will not be complete until she is able to possess a home of her own. For Brent, and by extension Jacobs, both of whom are formerly enslaved black women, having such a space is impossible so long as she must work in white women's homes in order to support herself and her children. Her desire for a home reveals the racial, gender, class, and spatial inequalities she—as well as many other black women, including Frado—faces. In Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's novel *The Story of*

Avis, Avis Dobell actually has a home of her own, which she shares with her husband, Philip, and their two children. Avis, however, finds little comfort in her home as it, along with her marriage to Philip, removes her from the spaces she prefers: the outdoors and her former painting studio in her aunt's gardens. For Avis, having a home does not bring her the comfort or freedom that Frado and Linda Brent suggest a home will help them achieve; rather, Avis's home separates her from the natural spaces she so values as well as her dream of becoming a successful painter. Like Frado and Linda Brent, Lily Bart of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* possesses no space of her own. She covets a small, simply furnished apartment, much like the one her friend Lawrence Selden inhabits, because she believes such a space will enable her to live life on her own terms. As a woman living on the fringes of upper-class New York society, Lily cannot have such a space and hope to maintain membership in this group. Indeed, living on her own would render Lily unmarriedable; thus, she must make do with her room at her aunt's home as well as the various guest rooms she frequently occupies while visiting her friends rather than transgress social custom by taking an apartment of her own.

Each of these characters—and, to some extent, the women who created them—desire a space of their own. Because of the spatial, social, and familial limitations each character faces, they are only able to have any spaces of their own by manipulating the boundaries of public and private spaces to create and claim interstitial spaces—spaces that are neither wholly public nor wholly private. Interstitial spaces, therefore, are somewhat easier to claim, as their very interstitial nature means they cannot specifically be owned by anyone; however, this also means that interstitial spaces are often spaces that no one else wants. Interstitial spaces, then, are often architecturally undesirable locations—a woodshed for Frado, a garret for Brent, a stone wall for Avis, and a train station lobby for Lily—that the average person would not care to occupy for any length of time. Thus, interstitial spaces are frequently locations that no one else wants. Their undesirability makes them more accessible to those who are in need of spaces of their own. Avis, Frado, Linda Brent, and Lily are able to claim the spaces they do, at least in part, because no one

else considers these locations inhabitable, valuable, or empowering. By claiming the interstitial spaces that they do, these characters are able to locate spaces of their own (albeit temporarily), to claim agency over their own bodies (at least so long as they occupy these spaces), and to direct the outcome of their own lives. But Avis, Frado, Lily, and Linda each has unfettered access to these spaces precisely because no one else deems them desirable. Although they find these spaces empowering, it is important to note that these characters locate agency in spaces that no one else wants. That these characters are able to claim agency over their own lives only in spaces no one else desires highlights how these characters, and women in positions similar to theirs, struggle to locate spaces to which they have can access without limitations as well as ones in which they can empower themselves at all.

Beyond the physical, interstitial spaces their characters locate, Wilson and Jacobs also claim metaphoric spaces for themselves. By writing their stories, these writers, whose race, gender, and economic positions severely limit their ability to own property of their own,¹⁴⁸ use their narratives as interstitial spaces, in which they could share their views on womanhood, mothering, and racism. By relying on metaphoric, interstitial spaces, Wilson and Jacobs—as well as countless other American women writers including Nancy Prince, Zilpha Elaw, Jarena Lee, E. Pauline Johnson, and Sarah Winnemucca¹⁴⁹—cast their narratives as interstitial spaces, transforming their texts into locations in which they are able to share private details of their lives and to add to the predominant discourse on nineteenth-century American womanhood, which often excluded women of color and working class women.

While Phelps's and Wharton's characters primarily rely on physical, interstitial locations, Avis and Lily still attempt to use these spaces as sites of empowerment. For her part, Avis uses interstitial spaces, which primarily take the form of outdoor spaces for her, as a source of creative inspiration and as a way to escape the feminine, interior spaces she finds stifling and oppressive. In outdoor, interstitial spaces, which include the beaches and fields that surround her hometown, Avis is able to express herself, both emotionally and creatively. When she chooses to marry and

risks not fulfilling her dream of becoming a painter, Avis finds that her access to interstitial spaces is limited, and she feels lost in the traditional spaces in which she spends the bulk of her time. With Avis, Phelps argues that the spatial limitations women face often cause them to forsake themselves as they try to fulfill traditional roles rather than pursuing their own paths in life. For her part, Lily is able to use interstitial spaces to her advantage—at least occasionally—as they allow her to put herself on display and to remain a part of upper-class New York society. Lily, however, struggles with her own interstitial existence, which is highlighted by her refusal to marry or to compromise any part of herself in order to achieve a space of her own. Through Lily, Wharton contends that women must have access to their own spaces, but she also suggests that women must be willing to compromise in order to achieve such spaces.

In interstitial spaces, each of these characters attempts to claim control of her life and body, to transgress boundaries that keep them from possessing spaces of their own, and to direct the outcome of their own lives. While Frado and Linda Brent are more successful at claiming interstitial spaces and using the agency they develop in these spaces to their advantage, all four characters emphasize “the need for women to possess spaces they can call their own. The [texts affirm] the notion that such environments are necessary for women to feel well and, more importantly, to survive” (Somers 135). By identifying and examining the role of interstitial spaces in these works, I argue that women, particularly women of nineteenth-century America, were preoccupied with the actual and metaphorical spatial constructs and limitations they faced on a daily basis. I see these four characters—Avis Dobell, Frado, Linda Brent, and Lily Bart—as exemplifying American women’s attempts, whether conscious or unconscious, to negotiate the spaces available to them, to carve out spaces of their own, and to empower themselves in interstitial locations. Through my analysis of these characters and their individual relationship with interstitial spaces, I consider the overlap of public and private spheres in a new way, arguing that many women used the overlap to their advantage rather than isolating themselves in the private sphere as the prevailing discourse on womanhood encouraged them to do.

Wilson, Jacobs, Phelps, and Wharton each argue that interstitial locations and the ability to negotiate the power women obtain by creating and claiming such spaces enables women to resist the spatial, gendered, classist, and racial limitations that keep them from having spaces of their own. Each contends that women—regardless of race or social class—must locate spaces of their own, even if the spaces is a tiny studio, a woodpile, a stifling garret, a small apartment, or a narrative if they are to overcome social convention and choose their own paths in life. By claiming interstitial spaces, these women will, effectively, have spaces of their own—even if they are spaces that undesirable to others—spaces that defy the notion of public and private spheres, that fulfill their individual needs, that exist beyond the architectural limitations of nineteenth and early-twentieth century America, and that allow them to live their lives according to their own dreams and desires.

NOTES

¹ In *Old-House Dictionary: An Illustrated Guide to American Architecture, 1600 to 1940*, Steven J. Phillips offers an ambiguous definition of a balcony, describing it as a “railed projected platform found above ground level on a building” (22).

² Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, in their book *The Decoration of Houses*, comment on the public nature of balconies that are attached to private spaces. While a balcony, such as the one attached to Mrs. Shelby’s bedroom, is a public space, Wharton and Codman advocate that it should be designed in such a way as to maintain the privacy of the space it is connected to; therefore, a balcony on “the more public side of the house” should be placed no lower than the second story (69). The position of Mrs. Shelby’s balcony, which is on the second floor of the Shelby house, serves to maintain her privacy while she is in her bedroom, but it also grants her access to the more public spaces of the plantation when she occupies it.

³ Woolf famously states that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4).

⁴ It is important to note that many upper-class homes, such as the one the Birds owned, often included a front and a back parlor. Front parlors were ostensibly public places, where visitors and relatives were received and entertained. The front parlor was “a place for social interaction and display rather than relaxation” (Clark 42). In contrast, the back parlor was less formal and was typically considered a space where the entire family, especially the husband and the wife, could relax and spend time together (69). Given this difference between front and back parlors, it seems likely that Mrs. Bird confronts her husband in their back parlor, although Stowe does not explicitly state that the conversation takes place in the back parlor.

⁵ Magawisca meets with Hope to tell her that her sister, Faith, is alive and well. Faith was taken prisoner when Mononotto, Magawisca’s father, attacked the Fletcher home, which was located outside of Boston. Faith was staying with the Fletcher’s while her father traveled to England to bring Hope to Boston to live with them. Mononotto’s attack, which resulted in the death of Mrs. Fletcher and several of her children, was prompted by his own wife’s murder during a raid of their village by English soldiers (Sedgwick 53). Mononotto takes Faith to replace one of his children, who also died during the massacre (63). During the course of their meeting, Magawisca and Hope discuss the possibility that Faith will leave Magawisca’s tribe to return to her natal family.

⁶ In their collection of essays, *No More Separate Spheres!*, Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher posit that the public and private spheres were not as clearly divided as many critics originally thought. I discuss this in more depth in the following section of the introduction.

⁷ As Hugh Brogan recounts in his 2007 biography *Alexis de Tocqueville: A Life*, de Tocqueville’s ostensible purpose in America was to study the prison system and provide an analysis of it to the French government. He and his traveling companion, Gustave de Beaumont, traveled extensively throughout the United States, visiting New England, the Northeast, and several Southern states. While they observed most facets of American society, including several prisons, a few Native American tribes, and slave quarters on some Southern plantations, they sought out the “‘*les gens éclairés*’ and were at a loss unless they made close contact with them. By this term they did not just mean the educated or enlightened. They meant the ‘upper class’ . . . They thus forfeited one of the chief advantages of foreign travel, and of travel to the United States above all, the opportunity to shed the burden and trap of their own social identity” (192). De Tocqueville’s musings on American women and the separation of spheres, then, refer almost exclusively to upper-class America, which accounts for his limited perspective regarding American women.

⁸ *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* was published in 1841, and *The American Woman’s Home* was published in 1869.

⁹ Wells’s emphasis.

¹⁰ I find it very interesting that Wells misses the irony behind the fact that she is publishing a call for women to remain in their traditional roles in *Atlantic Monthly*, one of the foremost American literary magazines at the end of the nineteenth century. Thanks to her literary foremothers, such as Catharine Sedgwick, Caroline Kirkland, and Lydia Maria Child, and many other women writers, Wells reaches a much wider audience than she would have if these women chose to be exclusively wives and mothers.

¹¹ Davidson and Hatcher's emphasis.

¹² For my purposes, I am defining the Republican Period as roughly from the end of the American Revolution through 1830, while the Antebellum Period extends from 1830 through the start of the Civil War. These dates are those that most architectural historians I cite, including Clark, rely on.

¹³ Clark's emphasis.

¹⁴ Clark also states that many homes of this period added "a summer kitchen, a room behind the main kitchen that could be used to prevent overheating the house during the summer and could also be used to contain the wood or coal burned in the winter" (62). Clearly, a family's ability to have a summer kitchen was dependent upon the size of their home as well as their economic and class position. Family's with limited space were less likely to have a summer kitchen or a kitchen removed from the main home altogether.

¹⁵ See note 3 for a discussion of front and back parlors.

¹⁶ It is important to note, however, that as the heads of household, men could claim control over any space in their homes, even ones traditionally marked as feminine.

¹⁷ Here, Shamir quotes Mark Girouard's *The Victorian Country House*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1979.

¹⁸ In many ways Phelps view of space foreshadows the view of space that Virginia Woolf expresses in her 1929 text *A Room of One's Own*. The primary difference between their conceptions of space hinges on the issue of interstitiality. Phelps realizes that most women living in the nineteenth century simply cannot just claim a room of their own, as Woolf advocates that women do (Woolf 4). Phelps, thus, suggests that most women can fulfill their intellectual and creative desires by claiming interstitial spaces. Woolf, however, urges women to simply claim spaces as their own, either by taking over rooms in their homes or by renting rooms that are removed from their homes. Woolf argues that women must claim private spaces of their own, not that they may need to manipulate existing locations to create the types of spaces they desire.

¹⁹ While the writers discussed in the next chapter, particularly Harriet E. Wilson and Harriet Jacobs, seemingly believed that in the nineteenth century a woman's primary role was in the private sphere, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps did not. Although Jacobs and Wilson did enter the public sphere as writers and activists to protest the conditions under which African American women were forced to live, both as enslaved and free individuals, and to earn a living to support themselves and their children, they did not explicitly critique the physical reality that women were expected to live out the bulk of their lives within the private sphere. Neither Wilson nor Jacobs sought to question what critic Mary Kelley defines as "the dominant prescription governing [most] female lives in the nineteenth century—and for that matter, before and after as well, from the colonial period into the twentieth century—a 'happy woman' was supposed to be the woman who married, had children, managed a household, and was materially supported by her husband" (139). Not only does this description of a "happy woman" not account for African American women, working class women, or women who had recently emigrated to the U.S., it also does not account for women of any background who either chose to postpone marriage and motherhood in favor of a career or chose a career over marriage and motherhood altogether. It is also important to note that the social norms governing women's roles within the private sphere, as I discuss in subsequent chapters, only accounted for women who were in an economic position to work exclusively in the home; thus, such domestic ideologies only included white middle- and upper-class women. Both Jacobs and Wilson were forced to enter the public sphere to financially support themselves and their children. Further, Jacobs's position as an escaped slave woman and Wilson's as an indentured servant placed both women beyond the traditional boundaries of the private sphere. While both question the ways domesticity differentiates between women of different classes and races, neither questions the belief that a woman's primary role was that of wife and mother.

²⁰ A *künstlerroman* is typically defined as a novel focusing on the development of an artist.

²¹ *The Story of Avis* is frequently compared to both *Aurora Leigh* and *Armstrong* as both epic poems tell the stories of women who desire to become successful artists rather than following more traditional paths. *Aurora* and *Armstrong* are different from *Avis*, however, because they do privilege their creative ambitions over their desires for love (Kehler 147). Both *Aurora* and *Armstrong* achieve their dreams of artistic success, while *Avis* forsakes hers to marry and have children. That each woman pursues a different type of art—Browning's *Aurora* is a poet; Eliot's *Armstrong* is an opera singer; and Phelps's *Avis* is a painter—suggests that women are capable of competing with men in each of these artistic fields.

²² Phelps's emphasis.

²³ It is important to note that while Phelps is critical of marriage in *The Story of Avis*, she is not necessarily critical of the class structure that enabled women like Avis and Mrs. Dobell to afford to hire help.

²⁴ According to Welter's description, women and the control they maintained over domestic interiors were among the few constants "[i]n a society where values changed frequently, where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity, where social and economic mobility provided instability as well as hope" (43-44).

²⁵ In *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850), Downing expresses the belief that a house "ought to be significant to the whole private life of man—his intelligence, his feelings, and his enjoyments" (as cited by Shamir 5).

²⁶ Please refer to the Introduction for a more detailed discussion of the architectural changes that occurred mid-century in American homes.

²⁷ In her 1841 work *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*, Beecher argues that American women "have an equal interest in all social and civil concerns; and that no domestic, civil, or political, institution, is right, that sacrifices her interest to promote that of the other sex" (4). Beecher maintains, however, that women must protect their interest in the state of the country by protecting the home. In fact the book explains that women can protect their interests by efficiently managing their homes and their children. She advises women on everything from healthful diets to managing domestic servants to the most economical way to organize the interiors of the home.

²⁸ It is important to differentiate between private, household gardens and large public gardens, which, like public parks, were also governed by strict social codes.

²⁹ The younger Elizabeth Stuart Phelps was christened Mary Gray Phelps, after a friend of her mother's. At some point after her mother's death, which occurred in 1852 when Phelps was just eight, and before she officially joined the church at age twelve, Phelps began using her mother's name. As Kessler details in her introduction to *The Story of Avis*, it is unclear "whether [Phelps] chose to 'wear' her mother's name or whether it was given to her" (xx). The only known reference to the name change is in Phelps's autobiography *Chapters from a Life*, which she dedicates "to my mother, whose name I am proud to bear" (11).

³⁰ The elder Phelps was very familiar with the lifestyle of a minister; her own father, the Reverend Stuart Moses, was a Congregational minister and a professor of Greek and Hebrew literature at Andover Theological Seminary (Kessler ESP 2). As a minister's daughter, Phelps was well aware of the difficulties associated with raising a family on a minister's salary.

³¹ Boyd further argues that the key difference between mother and daughter was their understanding of God. The elder Phelps likely viewed "God as a paternal, authoritative figure whom she served, while her daughter, more in keeping with [the Transcendentalists], would feel sanctioned to unfold the divine within herself" (47). Boyd's explanation is important to understanding the different styles of the two women, as the younger Phelps's belief that her relationship with God was more personal accounts for her early novels which attempt to revise women's traditional roles.

³² Although Phelps never gives Mrs. Dobell an opportunity to share her opinions on marriage, motherhood, and household management, given her interest in and apparent talent for the stage, it seems clear that she had not envisioned any of these things as part of her immediate future.

³³ In a later chapter, I examine the mother-daughter relationship in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*. I argue that, much like Mrs. Dobell, Mrs. Bart teaches her daughter Lily very little about the domestic arts. The two mothers' purposes, however, are drastically different. Whereas Mrs. Dobell wants Avis to know that there are avenues other than only that of being a wife and a mother open to her, Mrs. Bart wants Lily to become a model upper-class woman, who would have managed her home but would not have performed any actual domestic tasks herself.

³⁴ It seems less likely that the setting of the conversation is the kitchen given Avis's later statement that her mother "never cooked about the kitchen" (*Avis* 27).

³⁵ It is important to note that while Mrs. Dobell seemingly wastes from away lack of intellectual stimulation Phelps's own mother died from physical complications she experienced after the birth of her third child. Phelps believed, however, her mother died from the mental and physical toll writing, raising a family, and running a house took on her. Both Mrs. Dobell and Phelps's mother clearly struggled to combine their need for intellectual and creative stimulation with their desire to provide for their families. That both women die young seems to suggest that intellectual women either die from boredom or overwork.

³⁶ Phelps's emphasis.

³⁷ Phelps argument is, clearly, contingent upon a woman's ability to have someone else complete this sort of work for her. In Phelps's own case, once she moved out of her father's home, she relied upon servants, which her economic success enabled her to hire.

³⁸ The similarities between Avis and EBB's heroine are numerous. Both Avis and Aurora are left motherless as small children, both are raised by their unmarried aunts, and both want to forego marriage in favor of their artistic careers. Unlike Professor Dobell, Aurora's father encourages her poetic aspirations; his sudden death, when she is thirteen (Book 1, line 205), forces Aurora into the care of her aunt, who is much harder and less understanding than Aunt Chloe (Book 1, lines 337-71). Additionally, Aurora, who is in love with her cousin Romney, does not marry until she has become a successful poet (Book 9, lines 795-810), whereas Avis marries Philip, hoping she can combine marriage and an artistic career.

³⁹ This quotation further indicates that while Avis may be unfamiliar with her father's anger, her mother was not: "under that cavern of his brows glittered the rare spark which his wife had known so well" (33). Here Phelps tacitly informs her readers that Mrs. Dobell had spoken to her husband of her need for creative and intellectual stimulation and that he was as dismissive of her as he is of Avis. His almost immediate softening then can be read in multiple ways. He softens because he has not intended to hurt Avis's feelings, but he also becomes gentler in his language and approach, I argue, because he does not want Avis to feel the same frustration his wife did. His gradual change toward Avis's art suggests that he feels some responsibility for his wife's frustration and resulting death and that he does not want Avis's life to end similarly. His support of Avis proves that Professor Dobell has learned from his past mistakes.

⁴⁰ In fact, as Kessler points out, so many American women were seeking advanced training in sculpting and painting abroad that May Alcott, Louisa May Alcott's younger sister, wrote *Studying Art Abroad and How to Do It Cheaply* (1879) to help guide American women through Europe.

⁴¹ Although Frederick Maynard is fictional, Altamura actually taught painting in Naples. As Kessler notes, he is best known for his historical scenes (*Avis* 253, note 7). Here Phelps also draws on Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, in which Aurora's mother is associated with the freedom of Italian landscapes and her father with ordered English gardens (Book 1, lines 29, 65).

⁴² Phelps's emphasis.

⁴³ It is telling of how much Phelps loved her own study that she makes Avis's studio so similar to her own. Both are located in gardens and are some distance from the main house. Phelps wrote that "an out-of-door study is sure to prove your best friend, as you must tramp through a garden or a field to get to it and, as a result, cannot be easily disturbed" (117). The garden location also emphasizes Phelps's own love of nature and suggests that, like Avis, she also took inspiration from nature.

⁴⁴ In both the parlor and the sitting room, Avis joins the other women of Harmouth in various tasks aiding the Union Army. It is worth noting that even completing mundane tasks like rolling bandages and compiling care packages Avis must be guided by Chloe and Coy, which emphasizes both Avis's distaste for and ineptitude at such tasks (*Avis* 78-9).

⁴⁵ Avis and Philip take this trip for Philip's health, and although Avis clearly enjoys her time on the beaches and in the swamps of North Florida, she is, as always, focused more on caring for Philip than on meeting her own needs.

⁴⁶ Avis demonstrates her love for art even in the name she gives her son; he is named after Anthony Van Dyck, a seventeenth-century Flemish painter who was best known for his portraits of Charles I of England (Harris *Seventeenth-Century Art and Architecture* 175).

⁴⁷ Although Avis struggled to take an interest in silverware, dish towels, and bed linens, she was very concerned with the presence of color in the home. She did not want "a scarlet cricket or a purple tidy in the same room with a maroon curtain. [Philip's] library was a harmony in green and gray. The little room upon whose windows the buds of the elm-tree tapped were a melody in blue. . . The little house was a study in color" (*Avis* 132).

⁴⁸ Philip makes this demand shortly after the birth of their son, Van Dyck. Despite his assurance that he wanted a partner not a housekeeper, Philip makes it plan that he is unhappy with the state of their home, telling Avis "I don't see why we can't have things more comfortable" (153).

⁴⁹ Although it is not key to my argument, it is important to note that Philip, in spite of his focus on his career, has been largely unsuccessful as a university professor. Shortly before Avis became ill, she received a visit from her father, who tells Avis that Philip "[h]as not done anything" as a Professor of Geology (172). Professor Dobell tells Avis of Philip's inability to manage his own department and how he

will be asked to resign his position at Harmouth at the end of the term. It seems Philip is as unable to keep his intellect focused on his job much as he is unable to keep his affections focused on Avis and their children.

⁵⁰ It is important to note that most scholars of autobiography, including Carolyn A. Barros and P. Gabrielle Foreman, argue that all autobiographies are fictionalized to some extent (Barros viii, Foreman, "Spoken and Silenced" 312).

⁵¹ Since the rediscovery of *Our Nig*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has also discovered and subsequently published *The Bondwoman's Narrative* by Hannah Crafts, which is believed to have been written between 1853 and 1860. If *The Bondwoman's Narrative* was written prior to 1859, it would be the first novel written by a black woman. Crafts's narrative, however, remained unpublished until Gates discovered and authenticated it in 2002. As with *Our Nig*, critics have struggled to categorize *The Bondwoman's Narrative* as adhering to a specific genre. It has been variously defined as a slave narrative, a sentimental novel, and a gothic novel. Most critics agree it is a novel written by a formerly enslaved woman, who has yet to be identified with one hundred percent certainty. Like Wilson, Crafts clearly fictionalized aspects of her own life, but given her reliance upon gothic elements and sentimental conventions, most critics see Crafts's narrative as more fiction than autobiography (Gates xviii-xix).

⁵² The Bellmonts refer to Frado's room as the L-chamber presumably because it is in the shape of an L (Wilson 16).

⁵³ Hazel Carby, Mary Kelley, Cathy N. Davidson, Carla Peterson, Amy Schrager Lang, and Lora Romero are among the many critics who have pointed out that nineteenth-century ideologies of domesticity and womanhood excluded African American women, Native American women, and other women of color as well as white working class women.

⁵⁴ Although both Wilson and Jacobs's narratives are widely recognized to be heavily autobiographical in nature, both women fictionalized certain aspects of their lives.

⁵⁵ The extensive archival work done by Barbara White, P. Gabrielle Foreman, and Reginald Pitts has determined that the Bellmont family is a fictionalized representation of the Hayward family of Milford, New Hampshire. Their research further suggests that Mrs. Rebecca Hutchinson Hayward, or Mrs. Bellmont, was related to the Hutchinson Family Singers, a group of traveling singers who were well known as abolitionists (Foreman and Pitts xxxvi). For more on the Hutchinson-Hayward connection to the Bellmonts, see White's "'Our Nig' and the She-Devil: New Information about Harriet Wilson and the 'Bellmont' Family." *American Literature* 65.1 (1993): 19-52; and Foreman and Pitts's introduction to *Our Nig, or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*. New York: Penguin, 2005. xxiii-1.

⁵⁶ Foreman's emphasis.

⁵⁷ To eliminate confusion, I will refer to *Our Nig* as a narrative for the remainder of the chapter.

⁵⁸ Douglass does state that he received some assistance in planning his escape from his fiancée, Anna Murray (Douglass 112-3).

⁵⁹ Mary Kelley's *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America*, Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction: Guide to Novels by and About Women in America, 1820-70*, Elaine Showalter's *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing*, and Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher's *No More Separate Spheres!* each argue that the separate spheres were not as separate as Beecher would have had her readers believe.

⁶⁰ Beecher never married nor had children, and as both a writer and an educational reformer, she lived much of her life in the public sphere (Romero 23).

⁶¹ That Beecher excludes such a large group of women, particularly African American women, is somewhat ironic given the Beecher family's active stance against slavery.

⁶² *Hobomok* tells the story of Mary Conant, a young Puritan woman whose fiancé Charles Brown is believed to have died in a shipwreck. In her grief she marries Hobomok, a young Native American man from the Pequod tribe, in a native ceremony. As a result of the marriage, Mary's father disowns her as does the community of Salem, Massachusetts. After the birth of their son Charles Hobomok, named for his father and Mary's dead lover, Brown, who survived the shipwreck that was believed to have killed him, returns to Salem. Hobomok, aware that Mary has never stopped loving Charles, divorces Mary according to Indian tradition so that she can marry Charles, leaves Salem for the west, and is never seen again. The novel ends with Charles and Mary's Christian marriage and their decision to send Little Hobomok to England to be educated.

Despite its clear argument for the Native American assimilation into mainstream American culture, the novel is one of the earliest pieces of American literature to offer a three-dimensional representation of Native American characters. Child portrays Hobomok as an honest, loving, honorable young man rather than as blood-thirsty savage. Further, Child also argues that the Native Americans are justified in their distrust of Americans given the long history of broken promises and mistreatment. Although Child's conduct manuals advise women to stay out of politics, at least publicly, Karcher correctly argues that even by writing and publishing Child, and women like her, participated in and influenced the political discussion in the country (*FW* 100).

⁶³ Although Child does address the ways domesticity excludes and compromises the womanhood of Native American women in later essays, she does not, to my knowledge, consider how domestic ideologies exclude immigrant women or working-class women.

⁶⁴ Carby notes that "[t]hrough the cult of true womanhood did not remain the dominant ideological code [governing women's behavior] it should be remembered that the exclusion of black women from dominant codes of morality continued throughout the nineteenth century" (39).

⁶⁵ While the story is ostensibly Wilson's own, as I have discussed earlier in the chapter, Wilson creates Frado to separate herself from the circumstances she describes in the narrative, suggesting that Wilson was too close to the events of her life to write about them objectively. By creating Frado, Wilson is able to share events that she may have preferred to keep private.

⁶⁶ Although most critics, including Gates, P. Gabrielle Foreman, and Reginald Pitts, refer to Frado as an indentured servant, they actually use the term incorrectly. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an indenture as "the contract by which a person binds himself in service" (*OED Online*). Thus, to be legally considered an indentured servant, an individual must sign a legally binding contract with the person who will hold his or her indenture. At no point in the narrative does Frado state she ever signed such a contract, nor does any member of the Bellmont family refer to a contract of indenture. Further, the extensive archival work done by Barbara White, Foreman, Pitts, and R.J. Ellis has failed to turn up a contract of indenture between Wilson and the Hayward family, whom most critics believe to be the family upon whom Wilson based the Bellmonts. Although the Bellmonts and Frado seem to have an unspoken agreement that she is an indentured servant, given that they all agree that she will be free to leave the family when she is of age, Frado is, technically speaking, an unpaid servant, and I will refer to her as such.

⁶⁷ Wilson returns to first person in the narrative's final chapter.

⁶⁸ In keeping with the way Wilson refers to both the Bellmonts throughout the narrative, I will also refer to them as Mr. B. and Mrs. B.

⁶⁹ It is important to note that Welter's essay and her definition of "true womanhood" fall squarely within what Davidson and Hatcher define as "separate spheres criticism" (12). Although Welter does acknowledge that nineteenth-century women had limited power within the domestic sphere, she also assumes that "powerlessness equals virtue," a concept that post-separate spheres criticism argues is false (12). In order to consider accurately the role of American women—regardless of race or class—played in nineteenth-century society, we must acknowledge that gender is not "the most" or, indeed, the only "significant subject for discussion" (10). We must consider that "other conditions of identity or material conditions of authorship are relevant" to understanding what it meant to live in nineteenth-century America (10).

⁷⁰ *The Lady's Token* is a book of essays collected by Cotesworth Pinckney. Each piece extols the benefits of being a virtuous woman, a pious wife, and a good friend (128-9).

⁷¹ This manual was written by Harvey Newcomb and published in Boston.

⁷² Wilson's emphasis.

⁷³ Although Davis's larger discussion is not necessarily relevant to my argument, I do want to note that Davis argues that Wilson uses her "descriptions of pain not to reinscribe racial difference but to transcend it" (393). By narrating Frado's pain, which is ostensibly her own, Wilson "assumes the position of authoritative speaking subject" (400). Thus, describing Frado and her own pain in such detail is one of the many ways Wilson claims her voice as her own.

⁷⁴ Wilson's emphasis.

⁷⁵ Wilson's emphasis.

⁷⁶ Wilson's emphasis.

⁷⁷ There are surprisingly few critics who focus on this scene in much depth; those who do include White, Stern, Gates, and Foreman.

⁷⁸ I want to note here, again, that at no point was either Frado's or Wilson's indenture formalized. Wilson makes no mention of a contract of indenture ever being signed between the Bellmonts and Frado. Similarly, no such documentation has been uncovered in any of the archival work done on either Wilson or the Haywards, the family she was almost certainly indentured to. Both Frado and Wilson could have, then, left the families who virtually enslaved them at any point without fearing legal recourse. Their reasons for staying seem to have been both practical and psychological. It is likely that both Wilson and Frado initially stayed with their oppressors because, as children, they had no means to support themselves. Frado also remains, as Amy Schragger Lang argues, because of "the fears instilled [in her] by her mistress" (67). Believing no one would love or want her because of her race (as Mrs. Bellmont so often tells her), Frado stays because she has nowhere else to go and assumes life would be as hard for a young, orphaned black girl anywhere. Given the overwhelming similarities between Frado and Wilson, it seems safe to assume that Wilson's reasons for staying with the Hayward family are very similar to her fictional counterpart's.

⁷⁹ As Wilson never names the room of the house in which Frado receives this instruction and experiences her resulting revelation, I am speculating; however, given that Wilson describes the woman as "poor" and "plain," it seems unlikely that there would be a parlor, a sitting room, or even a dining room for them to work in (Wilson 68).

⁸⁰ According to the archival work done by Foreman and Pitts, Wilson's son George spent six weeks in 1855 at the Hillsborough County Poor Farm while Wilson recuperated from a severe illness (ix). He also seems to have lived with Joshua and Irene Hutchinson from 1855-1860, while Wilson tried to support them by selling hair products throughout Massachusetts and New Hampshire; when Wilson wasn't traveling, she also lived with the Hutchinsons (ix). Wilson began writing *Our Nig* during the time she was separated from her son.

⁸¹ Wilson was unable to afford a home of her own before and directly following the publication of *Our Nig*. In the years after she wrote her narrative, Wilson became well known as a spiritualist and did eventually have a home of her own (Foreman and Pitts xlii).

⁸² In fact, Hazel Carby holds that Aunt Marthy "embodied aspects of a true womanhood; she was represented as being pure and pious, a fountainhead of physical and spiritual sustenance for Linda, her whole family, and the wider black community" (57).

⁸³ I argue that Sands has limited control over Brent because, as a white man engaged in a sexual relationship with an enslaved woman, even one he does not own, Sands is still in a position of power over Brent. While he does treat Brent kindly and he does seem to care for her, he could beat her or even murder her, if he chose. If he did abuse or kill Brent, Sands would be expected to compensate Dr. Flint for Brent's monetary value, but he would not suffer any other legal consequences.

⁸⁴ Aunt Marthy's mistress, who was Mrs. Flint's mother, had promised to set Aunt Marthy free when she died. Her will upheld this promise, but Dr. Flint, who was in charge of his mother-in-law's estate, went back on this promise, telling Aunt Marthy she had to be sold to pay off her mistress's debts. He plans to sell her privately because he was unwilling "to wound her feelings by putting her up at auction" (14). Aunt Marthy sees "through his hypocrisy; she understood very well that he was ashamed of the job . . . if he was base enough to sell her when her mistress intended she should be free, she was determined the public should know it" (14). By demanding she be sold publicly, Aunt Marthy accomplishes two things. First, she humiliates Dr. Flint as the entire community is aware that Aunt Marthy has been promised her freedom. Second, she enables her mistress's sister, whom she has known her entire life, to purchase her for fifty dollars as no one will bid against her. As soon as the purchase is finalized, she frees Aunt Marthy (14).

⁸⁵ I make this distinction because Jacobs notes throughout her narrative that no one other than herself has possession of her mind or her spirit, although it is likely that Jacobs was considered beautiful because of her light complexion.

⁸⁶ I qualify this statement because Brent never offers her readers a complete physical description of herself.

⁸⁷ While it is unlikely anyone in the Flints' North Carolina community would see Dr. Flint as immoral if a sexual relationship between him and Brent were to become public, Brent does state that his fear of Aunt Marthy and his wish to not "have his villainy made public" offer her some protection (Jacobs 27).

⁸⁸ Brent succeeds in resisting Flint for as long as she does, at least in part, by refusing to read the sexually explicit notes he gives her and by avoiding him whenever possible (Jacob 28, 29).

⁸⁹ Jacobs's emphasis.

⁹⁰ Randle's emphasis.

⁹¹ Jacobs named her son Joseph, after her uncle who escaped to the North as a young man and was never heard from again (Yellin 33). She named her daughter Louisa Matilda in honor of her father's mistress, who had allowed Jacobs's father to hire out his time and to maintain his own household (xix).

⁹² Brent never reveals the identity of the friend who shelters her for several weeks.

⁹³ Although Brent only hides in the swamp for a few hours, she reveals what lengths she will go to secure her freedom from Flint by her willingness to hide there at all. To escape detection, she silently endures the bite of a poisonous snake, telling her readers, "The dread of being disabled was greater than the physical pain I endured" (Jacobs 80).

⁹⁴ Brent begins to realize just how much power she wields from her various hiding places when she learns that Dr. Flint was compelled to sell her brother and her children to recoup the money he has spent searching for her. Dr. Flint agrees to sell them to a slave trader for nineteen hundred dollars, believing they are to be taken farther South before they are sold (Jacobs 85). Flint does not realize that the trader has purchased William and the children for Mr. Sands, who allows all three to live with Aunt Marthy. Brent is both comforted and empowered by Flint's decision to sell William and the children. In fact, she describes the day she learns that Flint no longer owns her children as "the first time since my childhood I had experienced any real happiness . . . The darkest cloud that hung over my life had rolled away. Whatever slavery might do to me, it could not shackle my children. If I fell a sacrifice, my little ones were saved" (Jacobs 88).

⁹⁵ Brent stays in hiding for so long because she and her friends and family believe it is too risky for her to try to escape to the North.

⁹⁶ The attic is located directly over the mistress's bedroom, and she and her slave Betty are the only ones who can access it.

⁹⁷ Brent is compelled to leave the attic because she and Betty believe that Jenny, one of Betty's fellow slaves, may have learned of her presence in the house. Better claims that Jenny "allers got de debble in her," which suggests that Jenny is often up to no good (Jacobs 89). Although Brent never specifically describes her in any particular way, Jenny is tacitly portrayed as feeling more allegiance to the white slave owners than her fellow slaves. This fact is emphasized when "mischievous" Jenny's sudden arrival in Brent's grandmother's house finally prompts Brent to leave the garret and travel north (120).

⁹⁸ Jean Fagan Yellin suggests that Jacobs experienced profound sensory deprivation due to the long periods she spent in total darkness. Fagan argues that her sensory deprivation likely affected Jacobs long after she left the garret (50).

⁹⁹ Throughout the narrative, Brent describes the debilitating physical effects living in the garret had upon her body. She frequently crawls around the "den for exercise," but in spite of her efforts to keep her body in shape, she loses the use of her legs and arms on several occasions (Jacobs 92, 99, 100). In the summer, Brent is "tormented by hundreds of little red insects . . . that pierced through [her] skin, and produced an intolerable burning," and the "heat of [the] den was intense, for nothing but thin singles protected [her] from the scorching summer's sun" (93). She suffers frostbite on her shoulders and feet in the winter, injuries that affect her long after she leaves the garret behind (94).

¹⁰⁰ From the early modern period through the late-nineteenth century, the word *loophole* referred to a small "opening to look through" or to admit "light or air" (*OED Online*). While this definition does refer to the garret, Brent also seems to be using *loophole* more figuratively. In fact, she seems to be directly referencing William Cowper's 1784 poem "The Task," in which Cowper writes "'Tis pleasant through the loopholes of retreat / To peep at such a world" (*OED Online*). By alluding to Cowper, Brent highlights the pleasure she received from witnessing the world from the garret.

¹⁰¹ Given that Brent's status as an enslaved black woman makes her metaphorically invisible in most venues of American society, I find it both ironic and fitting that she empowers herself by making herself physically invisible to the Flints and the community.

¹⁰² Although using *garret* to specifically refer to a watch-tower had elapsed from common usage by the early-seventeenth century, it was still used to refer to a parapet or other types of fortifications in the nineteenth century (*OED Online*).

¹⁰³ Brent actually flees to the North at her grandmother's insistence because her grandmother believes she may have unintentionally exposed her to Jenny, "the mischievous housemaid, who had tired to enter" the attic Brent occupied when she first escaped (Jacobs 120).

¹⁰⁴ When Brent first arrives in New York, she finds Ellen living with Mrs. Hobbs, a cousin of Mr. Sands. Several years earlier, Sands, who ostensibly owned both Ellen and Benjamin, had taken Ellen with his wife and daughter to Washington, D.C., where he was working as a senator. The Sands, with Brent's knowledge but not necessarily her consent, then sent Ellen to live with the Hobbs, believing she would be safer farther away from the Flints (Jacobs 109). Brent is distressed to learn that Mrs. Hobbs views Ellen as her daughter's slave, as Mrs. Hobbs tells Brent "I suppose you know that my cousin, Mr. Sands, has *given* [Ellen] to my eldest daughter" (131). Unfortunately, because of her economic position, Brent must leave Ellen with the Hobbs family until she is financially able to care for her.

¹⁰⁵ It is important to note that Brent did not want anyone to purchase her freedom because she did not believe that something that was rightfully hers should have to be purchased to ensure her safety (Jacobs 155).

¹⁰⁶ Kaplan's emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ When she is fifteen, Brent falls in love with a free black man, who proposes marriage and tries to purchase her freedom. Dr. Flint refuses to sell Brent to her lover, telling Brent, "If you *must* have a husband, you may take up with one of my slaves" (Jacobs 34). Realizing that Flint will never agree to sell her or grant her permission to marry the man she loves, Brent encourages him "to go to the Free States, where his tongue would not be tied, and where his intelligence would be of more avail to him" (37).

¹⁰⁸ Both Tuxedo Park, which is southwest of New York City, and Rhinebeck, which is northwest of the city, were small towns where many wealthy New York families owned country homes.

¹⁰⁹ It goes without saying that Frado's understanding of home is vastly different from Brent's. Frado's experiences with the Bellmonts teach her what a home *should not* be, while Brent's time with her first mistress and her grandmother help her envision what a home *should* be.

¹¹⁰ Bhabha quotes "ascriptive" from Carole Pateman's *The Disorder of Women*. To ascribe meaning is to attribute a value or a meaning to something, whereas to describe would assume that a thing or a person has inherent qualities that can be observed or noted. Thus, the domestic sphere, as Bhabha deems it, is ascriptive because it is constructed rather than something that exists naturally.

¹¹¹ In 1888, Joshua Jones, whom biographer Hermione Lee describes as Wharton's "eccentric millionaire cousin," died and left Wharton, as well as "a number of other . . . relations he never met," \$120,000 (22). This money ensured Wharton's "financial independence," enabling Wharton and Teddy to travel to take an extended Aegean cruise and being plans for *The Mount* (Benstock 27).

¹¹² Wharton's first home was a "standard brownstone residence just off Fifth Avenue and Madison Square Park" (Lee 17). As Lee notes, it was indistinguishable from the other houses in the neighborhood, "all with a parlour and dining room on the ground floor, all with their similar façades, and built in such" a uniform style "that if you were not careful you might find yourself going to dinner at the wrong house" (17). In 1866, largely in response to the economic recession sparked by the conclusion of the Civil War, the Jones moved to Europe and rented out their home. They traveled extensively through Spain, France, and Italy, living primarily in various hotels (Benstock 21). When they returned to New York, Wharton was ten and had spent six years in Europe. She found New York ugly and unwelcoming and struggled to acclimate herself to the city (21). When she married Teddy Wharton, she moved from her parents' Manhattan home to Pencraig Cottage, a small house across the road from the Jones's house in Newport (Lee 75). In the first few years of their marriage, the Whartons had no New York home of their own; they stayed in Wharton's mother's home when they visited the city. It was not until 1897 that Edith and Teddy Wharton had a home of their own in New York, a small house on 884 Park Avenue, and they rented this home following the advice of her mother (Lee 81). I include this brief history of the various homes that Wharton lived in prior to building *The Mount* to emphasize how important it was to her to have a space that she constructed and designed according to her own needs and ideals.

¹¹³ Wharton's parents were George Frederick Jones and Lucretia Rhinelander Jones. She married Teddy Wharton, who was a well-known bachelor and sportsman among New York's social elite, at the encouragement of her mother in 1885, when she was 23 (Lee 74-5).

¹¹⁴ Wharton moved to France permanently following her 1912 divorce from Teddy (Lee 396-98). She purchased Pavillon Colombe, which was located on the edge of Montmorency forest, following the First World War (Bentley 165).

¹¹⁵ Gerty's presence in the novel highlights the issue of class in the novel. Although she too lives on the fringes of upper-class New York society, she is not viewed in the same way as Lily. Unlike Lily, Gerty is neither beautiful, nor does she seem to have come from money. Further, she is not considered marriage material by anyone in the novel, and thus, Lily does not view her as a threat. Gerty's class position, then, makes it acceptable both for her to work and for to have a flat of her own.

¹¹⁶ Wolff's emphasis.

¹¹⁷ In fact, Wharton's own family moved to Europe for six years beginning in 1866. As Lee notes, the decrease in "property values after the Civil War affected a whole generation, and the Joneses were not the only couple of their class to lease out their houses . . . and to go to live in Europe in order to economise" (sic 26).

¹¹⁸ That Wharton never reveals where Mr. Bart works reflects what Ellen J. Goldner sees as upper-class New York society's anxiety "over volatile Wall Street fortunes," even as most members of that society do not clearly understand the cause of their anxieties (286). Goldner further asserts that "Wall Street provokes continual . . . anxiety in part because in its volatility it rapidly makes and breaks fortunes, threatening the lines of the established order" (286). This volatility certainly affects the Barts.

¹¹⁹ Wharton's emphasis.

¹²⁰ Simon Rosedale shares Mrs. Bart's view of marriage, telling Lily "I wanted money, and I've got more than I know how to invest; and now the money doesn't seem to be of any account unless I can spend it on the right woman. That's what I want to do with it: I want my wife to make all the other women feel small" (HM 139).

¹²¹ Wharton reveals very little about Dillworth. In fact, all we know of his relationship with Lily is that his mother seems to have encouraged him to stop courting Lily because she "was frightened" of Lily's sense of style. In fact, Lily tells Selden that the relationship ended because his mother "was afraid I should have all the family jewels reset. And she wanted me to promise I wouldn't do over the drawing-room" (HM 10).

¹²² Elaine Showalter argues that Mr. Bart "does not so much die as get discarded" by his wife (96). Once he is no longer able to financially support his wife and daughter, Mr. Bart quickly disappears from both their lives and the novel.

¹²³ Wolff's emphasis.

¹²⁴ Somers's emphasis.

¹²⁵ Given Judy Trenor's insistence that Lily participates in these activities, I find it somewhat ironic that she chastises Lily for not refraining from these behaviors in order to attract and marry Percy Gryce (HM 60-2).

¹²⁶ Emphasis mine.

¹²⁷ Wharton offers no description of this room, other than to remark on the presence of electric light in the room, which Mrs. Peniston has yet to install in her home (HM 25).

¹²⁸ Here Hayden cites Andrew Alpern's *Apartments for the Affluent: A Historical Survey of Building in New York*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975.

¹²⁹ Selden frequently dines at his club, as he tells Gerty the evening that he dines with her in her small apartment (HM 122).

¹³⁰ Wharton may have had such homes in mind when describing the type of charity work Gerty Farish does. Gerty fundraises for an organization that provides "comfortable lodgings, with a reading-room and other modest distractions, where young women of the class employed in downtown offices might find a home when out of work, or in need of rest" (HM 87).

¹³¹ Cromley states that at least one building designed for working women seeking a middle-class life style was begun by department store owner A.T. Seward and architect John Kellum. The building, which was begun in 1869, was "intended for sales clerks" and other "women of means" (112). It included private apartments designed similarly to those marketed to bachelors. Unfortunately, construction took longer than expected, and the building did not open until 1877. By that time "the set rents were too high for store clerks," and the building became the Park Avenue Hotel (114).

¹³² I want to note that in the numerous architectural histories of New York that I consulted, there is no reference to women living in apartment buildings like the Benedick at the turn of the twentieth century.

Elizabeth Hawes's book *New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City* (1869-1930) does include a chapter discussing how apartments were designed for and marketed to women. Her discussion, however, focuses on the technological features, such as telephones, light bulbs, elevators, vacuum-cleaning systems, and refrigeration plants, appealed to middle- and upper-class married women (184-86). Her thorough history makes no mention of apartment houses designed for single women. In fact, Getry's apartment, with its private sitting room and separate bedroom, seems to have been somewhat unusual, given that most apartment buildings for women resembled modern-day dormitories. It seems highly unlikely, then, that Lily could have found the type of apartment she desired in a building for respectable women.

¹³³ Wharton's emphasis.

¹³⁴ Gerty seems to be a distant cousin of the Van Osburghs, one of the wealthiest families among New York's social elite; Wharton, however, never fully explains how Gerty is related to the family (*HM* 71).

¹³⁵ Mrs. Haffen offers to sell Lily the letters, which were written by Bertha Dorset and include details of her lengthy affair with Selden. She implies that she will sell them to someone who will make them public if Lily opts not to buy them (*HM* 80-4).

¹³⁶ Lily broaches the subject of finances with Trenor after meeting him at the station and riding with him back to Bellomont. That Lily speaks to Trenor about her financial troubles when she does is somewhat ironic given that Judy has asked her to meet him to prevent Carry Fisher from meeting him and asking him to lend her some money, something Carry frequently asks her friends' husbands to do (*HM* 63).

¹³⁷ See my discussion of dens and studies as masculine spaces in chapter one.

¹³⁸ It is important to emphasize that Lily is taken completely off-guard by Trenor's deception and Judy's absence. Had she realized Judy was not home she would not have agreed to a late-night visit.

¹³⁹ It is worth noting that Lily exits the Trenors' home at the precise moment that Selden and Ned Van Alstyne, who is Lily's cousin, are walking past. Both men know Judy Trenor is still at Bellomont, and thus, they both mistakenly assume Lily and Trenor are having an affair. Van Alstyne asks Selden to keep what they've witnessed to himself: "A-hem—nothing of this, eh, Selden? As one of the family, I know I may count on your—appearances are deceptive—and Fifth Avenue is so imperfectly lighted—" (*HM* 127). Their reaction to seeing Lily leave the Trenors' at this time of night reinforces the hypocritical view of New York society has of gender. Both Selden and Van Alstyne engaged in affairs with married women, yet both feel Lily's behavior is unacceptable.

¹⁴⁰ Wharton's emphasis.

¹⁴¹ In her forthcoming article "Private Secretaries in Early-Twentieth Century America," Sylvia Hoffert argues that "the work of private secretaries, while largely invisible, was critical on both a practical and emotional level to the ability of the rich society matrons to carry on their public lives" (n. pag.). Hoffert further asserts that because of how closely they worked with their employers a sense of personal intimacy often developed between social secretaries and their employers. Thus, social secretaries could not always separate themselves from the actions of their employers, particularly if the actions were unconventional or vulgar.

¹⁴² The Gormers are new on the New York social scene, and Sam Gormer seems to have made his money on Wall Street (*HM* 181). Although they are considered nouveau riche, they are quickly being accepted into Lily's social set, but, as Carry Fisher tells Lily, "they were really doing extremely well . . . but suddenly they decided that the whole business bored them, and that what they wanted was a crowd they could really feel at home with" (181). Thus, Lily helps them negotiate the intricacies of upper-class New York society while they also develop relationships with several actresses and artists. Norma Hatch, herself a former actress, is newly divorced and has recently moved to New York "from the West" (212). She is hoping to use the wealth she received from her divorce to elevate her position. She is also, however, quickly making the acquaintance of Freddy Van Osburgh, "the small slim heir of the Van Osburgh millions," whom she hopes to make her third husband (214).

¹⁴³ Lily leaves her position with Mrs. Hatch to avoid being accused of encouraging her relationship with Freddy Van Osburgh.

¹⁴⁴ Ellen does stay with her grandmother, Mrs. Manson Mingott, for several weeks after her arrival in New York. She moves to the house on Twenty-third Street once she decides her move to New York will be permanent.

¹⁴⁵ It is important to note that although Wharton wrote *The Age of Innocence* some fifteen years after the publication of *The House of Mirth*, she set the novel in the 1870s, approximately thirty years before the events of *The House of Mirth*. Thus, sections of the city that Lily frequents in *The House of Mirth*, including portions of Fifth Avenue, are largely undeveloped in *The Age of Innocence*.

¹⁴⁶ As I stated earlier, the letters contain intimate details of Bertha's affair with Selden. If the letters were made public, Bertha's husband would certainly divorce her. Thus, Bertha would be very willing to renew her friendship with Lily to ensure the letters were not made public. If Bertha publicly renewed her friendship with Lily, Lily would be welcomed back into New York society.

¹⁴⁷ Simon Rosedale, the only other person other than Mrs. Haffen to know Lily possesses the letters, urges Lily to use the letters to restore her position in society at least twice. He even proposes marriage on the condition that Lily reconcile with Bertha (*HM* 234). Because of his status as Jewish man, Rosedale lives on the fringes of upper-class society, despite his extreme wealth. A marriage to a woman like Lily would elevate his status instantly, but a marriage to Lily would only improve his status if her reputation were restored.

¹⁴⁸ Although there were no nineteenth-century laws in the Northeast, where both Wilson and Jacobs lived, preventing African American women from owning property, only 200 African American women owned property in New York City in 1870 (Dabel 70). Further, the average piece of property owned by a black woman was valued at \$345 (71). Given their respective financial struggles, neither Wilson nor Jacobs was in a position to purchase property of their own at the time they wrote their narratives.

¹⁴⁹ I contend that the autobiographical narratives of each of these women can be viewed as interstitial spaces in which they share their life stories in order to change the outcome of their lives as well as the lives of all nineteenth-century American women of color. Their narratives are Prince's *A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Nancy Prince* (1853), Elaw's *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw* (1846), Lee's *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee* (1836), Wimmemucca's *Life Among the Piutes* (1883), and Johnson's *The Moccasin Maker* (1913).

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